



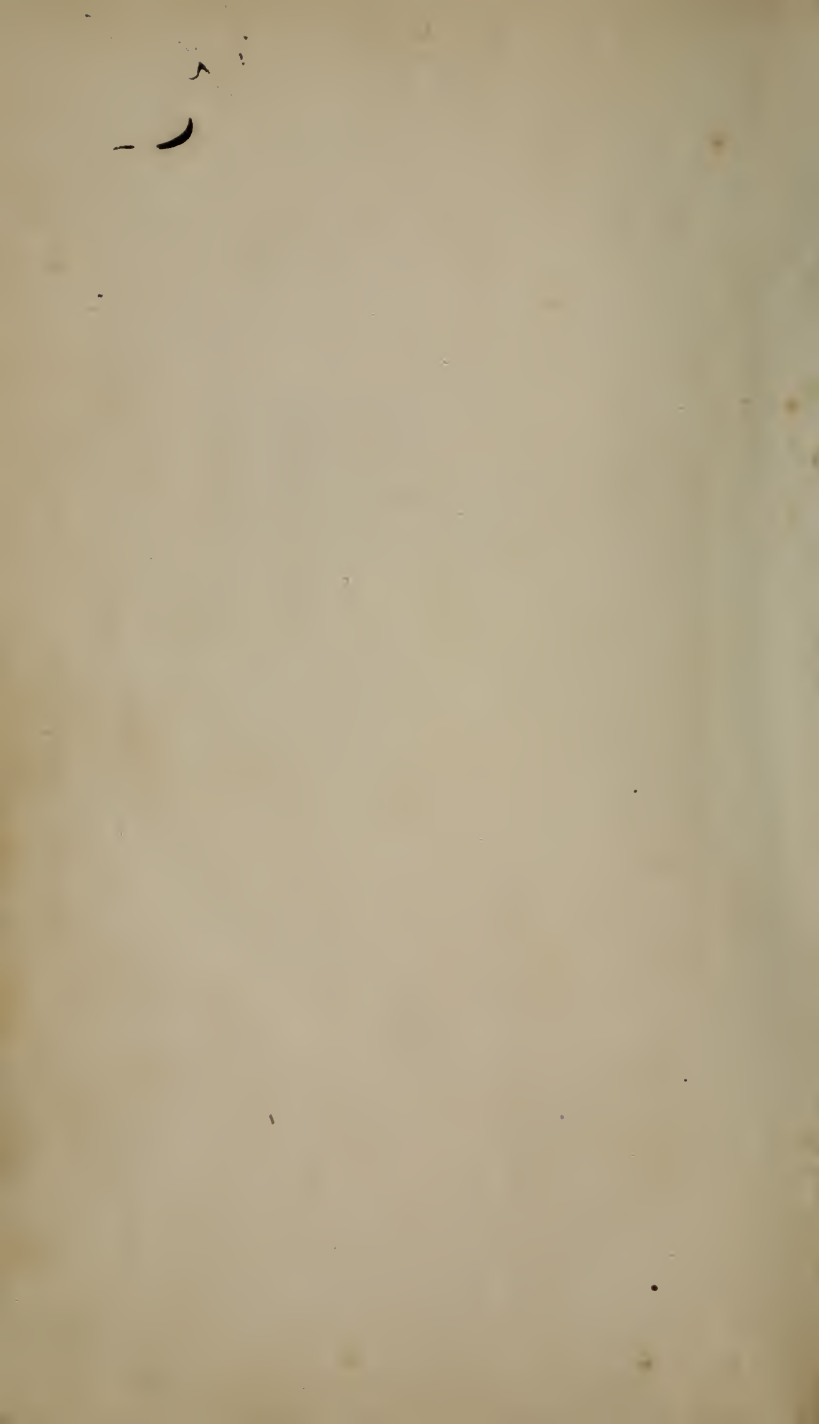


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OLD MEMORIES.

A NOVEL.

BY

JULIA MELVILLE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

"I think we are not wholly brain,
Magnetic mockeries."

IN MEMORIAM.

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OLD MEMORIES.

CHAPTER I.

A MONTH passed quietly away, and brought us into the glow and warmth of "the leafy month of June."

Charles grew better and stronger as this season advanced; he drove out in the pony carriage through the woods and lanes, scented with honey-suckles and wild roses, and lingered on the terrace in the long golden evenings.

Mary's long threatened visitor, Miss Grimston had arrived at last, and was domiciled at the parsonage, by no means to the felicity of its un-

grateful inmates. Her visit had been perforce deferred by reason of our loss; but there are some evils under the sun from which there is no escape, and Miss Grimston was one of them, and accordingly she swooped down like a griffin upon the parsonage, with her usual number of black trunks, studded with brass nails, and much resembling coffins, and sat herself down with grim composure for her ordinary visit of a month or six weeks.

But even Miss Grimston, in common with other human ills, was more endurable this shining summer time, when the earth was wantoning in green leafiness, and astir with the music of birds. Still she was a sore thorn in poor Mary's side, upon whose sunny forehead there was often a cloud of lassitude and weariness that I always set down to the visitors account.

Little Ned entertained a horror of the good lady, which was amusing, though highly provoking at the same time, invariably going off into a

fit of screaming if left alone with her for a moment.

Miss Grimston pronounced him a spoilt brat, and utterly scouted all poor Mary's pleadings that he was a nervous and delicate child.

Mary's pretty servant maid, Hannah, gave warning, entertaining an insufferable objection to Miss Grimston's coming into the kitchen at all hours, lifting up the lids of the sauce-pans, and poking the contents about with a fork, and putting her through a strict cross-examination as to her expenditure of coals, candles, butter, soap, flour, &c., &c. She was much given to visiting the poor, and usually three times a-week set forth to make a round of all the cottages in the parish, but as her donations were always confined to tracts of a terrifying nature, and black doses, it is doubtful whether the recipients of her charity were much benefited thereby. She had her regular days for her rounds, and invariably on these days set forth, rain or shine, with a basket of tracts and vials

of black dose on her arm, which she distributed with scrupulous impartiality. There was no escape for her victims either from tracts or physic, for to ensure that both were properly benefited by, she instituted a strict questioning on the subject of the one, and stood over the patient like a dragon till he or she swallowed the other.

Mr. Tremordyn said the woman was only fit to be treated with contempt, but still like a wasp or hornet on a hot day, she irritated and plagued him marvellously, pulling him down from his pedestal of unmoveable dignity, and nearly penetrating his armour of proof.

Moreover, she inclined to dissenting opinions, and once on a Sunday, usually attended Mr. Melchisedech Howlett's services, at the little red brick chapel, which was a grievous annoyance to Mr. Tremordyn, who was a staunch high churchman, and although she usually went to church in the afternoon, to make up for her condescension, she spent the evening in abusing

the singing, the organ, and lastly the sermon, which she vowed contained heretical doctrines, not to be found in Scripture.

Mr. Tremordyn was sometimes provoked into answering, but Miss Grimston, true to her principle of sticking up to people, kept up so determined a warfare, that he was fain to beat a retreat into his study, shutting the door after him like a thunder-clap; whereupon Miss Grimston, would feelingly deplore the evil tempers of man, especially shocking in a minister of the gospel.

On these occasions Mary would usually steal up into the nursery, to sit with little Ned; and I, who often spent Sunday evening at the parsonage, would quietly slip up after her, under a pretence of fetching her down. If, however, we were absent more than a quarter of an hour, Miss Grimston would send up a message by Hannah, with her compliments, to enquire if we had both gone to bed with head-aches, which brought us down in confusion.

I believe Mary's sweetness, and beauty, and graceful, good temper, made as much impression on Miss Grimston as they would upon a flint wall. She was one of those who trudge on straight through life, and never linger in pleasant spots; who have a keen eye for its pitfalls and its rough and miry places; who relish its leaden skies and its cutting winds, but who absolutely close their nostrils against its roses and violets; who shut their eyes to the glories of the heaven above them.

But the summer days brought us a brighter visitor than that iron virgin, no other than Annora, whom I had not seen, nor heard from, for a long time. I scarcely knew whether pain, pleasure, or shame was strongest in my fluttering heart, when I saw her bright face and streaming golden ringlets flitting up the terrace, and when she caught me in her frank embrace.

I believe I held shyly back, scarcely daring to think we should be as in days gone by, but

there was no change in her sunny, unclouded face, nor in her joyous, ringing voice.

Nora was soon installed in her pretty little room near mine, leaning back in her arm-chair, and keeping us, in her graceful queenly indolence, all employed about her, in combing and curling her shining hair, disordered by the long journey, Maude and Esther in unpacking her boxes, and spreading out her dainty robes over the bed and chairs, and arranging her fairy caskets of perfumes and jewellery on the dressing table.

She asked Aunt Mary, after breakfast next day, if she would object to a new acquaintance?

"That depends on who he is," said Aunt Mary with a smile.

"Only Frank Langley—my cousin, Mrs. Clayton's nephew. He is such a nice fellow. We are like brother and sister."

"Fortunate Frank Langley," said Charles.

"Be quiet, Charlie, or I shall set you down as one of the 'humbugs.'"

"And whence comes he?" asked Esther.

“He is at Haverford, just now, staying at the hotel. He was my travelling companion yesterday. Emily did not like me to come alone, so Frank volunteered to be my protector. He is waiting for his commission, and has some great friend at Haverford, whose regiment he wants to get into. I particularly enjoined him to come and pay his respects here to-day, adding by way of inducement that Holmsley was noted for its beauties. Frank is an inconstant knight—I warn you all—who loves and rides away.”

“I’m afraid he won’t come over this broiling day,” said Esther, “unless he is sun proof.”

It was an intensely hot morning, the languid air had a lazy shimmer in it, and rested like a weight on your spirits; not a breath stirred the long cumbrous branches of the elms; the very butterflies seemed to flit lazily over the grass, and the very flowers looked sleepy and drooping. We all felt restless and idle in the pleasant shady room, with its stands of rich hot-house flowers. To attempt any occupation was a direful im-

possibility; nothing could be done save subsiding into the easiest chairs we could find, appeasing our consciences with some lazy pretence of needle-work or reading. Maude lay down on the floor at Nora's feet, put a cushion under her head, and shutting her eyes, floated off into dream-land. Charles, pale and languid with the heat, lay half asleep on the sofa. Silence rested on us like a spell.

"Here he comes!" cried Nora.

Curiosity whirled away sleepiness. We all sprang up and rushed to the window. Up the avenue came the sharp, rapid clatter of horse's feet.

"Isn't he a smart-looking cavalier?" said Nora, as the horseman emerged from the trees.

"What a pace he rides this scorching day," said Maude, hardly yet awake, shaking back her disordered curls.

"What a horse!" exclaimed Charles, whose old love of horses was as strong as ever; "look at his proud head and slender arching neck."

“It’s not his own,” said Nora, confidentially; “his friend must have lent it to him, for Frank’s is as poor—”

Here came a tremendous ring at the hall-door.

“As he’s impatient,” said Charles, “well, I’ll leave you to entertain this gallant horseman.”

He crossed the room, and disappeared through the opposite window, leading out on the terrace.

“He’s gone,” said Nora; “how tiresome. I wanted to introduce him to Frank. Run and bring him back, Maude.”

“No, no, he’ll never come: he hates seeing strangers.”

“Mr. Langley, if you please, ma’am.”

The visitor walked in with a quick, firm, confident tread, that seemed like the echo of a determined will—a handsome, fair young man, tall, straight, and well-built, with a peculiarly quick bright blue eye, whose keen straightforward glance met yours with open freedom, and that flashed (as I saw afterwards) with fiery impatience at contradiction. He greeted

Nora with amusing coolness, giving her a hearty kiss, to which she submitted with a better grace than I expected.

His large blue eyes opened wide with an undisguised stare of admiration as Nora introduced him to Maude and Esther, who stood in diverted wonderment.

"This is my sister Helen, Frank," said Nora, taking my hand with her pretty air of condescension and protection.

"Your sister? I never knew you had one," returned he, fixing his clear, keen, flashing blue eye full on me with blunt surprise.

I felt my cheeks hot with a painful glow.

"Then you are very stupid and absurdly forgetful," she said, with a queenly frown. "Have you never heard me speak of my little sister Helen, at Holmsley?"

"Never, I'll take my oath," said he, still staring at me, to my great discomfiture and annoyance; "however, I'm delighted to make her acquaintance now; how d'ye do?" stretching out

his hand and nearly dislocating my wrist with the heartiness of his gripe.

“He’s the strangest fellow in the world, never mind him,” whispered Nora in my bewildered ears. “Now sit down, Frank, and tell us how you got here this scorching morning.”

“On Robertson’s horse. I came the four miles in a quarter of an hour—pretty good riding this hot day.”

“And the poor horse?” said Esther laughing.

“Oh! he sweated rather hard; but I gave him into the charge of the groom to cool and get rubbed down. I never can ride slow. I’ve tried it once or twice, but it’s no use.”

Esther made some laughing rejoinder, and they were all soon deep in a merry conversation. I hardly knew why I could not join in it. I suppose his unceremonious bluntness and total disregard of anything like forms, had startled and offended the shyness that had rather increased upon me lately. I sat apart in the window, bending over my work, and disappointing

all Nora's efforts to drag me into the current of their talk. Uncle Edward came in soon after, and the conversation took a sporting turn.

Mr. Langley seemed in his element. He was an enthusiastic lover of hunting and shooting. and Uncle Edward promised him as much of the latter as he liked if he stayed at Haverford till September. Then he gave us a long description of deer-stalking in the Highlands, and said that English hunting was tame and dull compared to that glorious sport. I could fancy him brave and skilful in any pursuit of keen excitement where a strong arm, steady nerves and a keen eye were needed. He gave me the idea of "glorying in his strength," rejoicing in his strong sinews and tall athletic figure, in his pride of health and native power of frame and constitution. You read it in the free bold glance of his bright blue eye, in his loud careless laugh, his quick firm tread, a half unconscious trick of stretching and withdrawing his right arm, as though testing the strength of its muscles.

The morning slipped away in their chatting and laughter, while I sat apart, casting shy glances over my work at the visitor, and dreamily speculating on his character, not from any liking I had taken to him, but only from an idle habit I had always been prone to indulge in.

Mr. Langley was invited to stay to dinner (we dined early in this lazy summer time), to stay the whole day in short, and ride back to Haverford in the cool of the evening. Esther gravely assured him that the invitation was given as much for his horse's sake as his own. By the time dinner was over I had persuaded myself that I did not like him at all. There was something in his bold open glance (though it could not honestly be called impertinent), something in his blunt speeches that jarred upon me.

Charles was very wise not to come down to dinner, he had escaped being tired and bored as I was. I would go and lie down in my room, and read or go to sleep this scorching afternoon,

heartily grateful that there were other and more willing shoulders on which I could shift the burden of entertaining the new visitor. He must have been well entertained, too, judging by the peals of laughter that reached me now and then, whenever the drawing-room door was opened, as I lay, half asleep, in solitary state on the sofa in my room. About four o'clock Maude and Esther came running up for their straw hats; they were going to take Mr. Langley out in the garden, the orchards, and the wood, and shew him all the lions of Holmsley. "Wouldn't I come?"

"What an immense deal of trouble you are taking this broiling day to amuse that insupportable man," said I sleepily.

"You don't mean to say you don't like him, Nelly?" exclaimed Maude. "Why, he is absolutely jolly! Such lots of fun in him—he's been keeping us laughing the whole afternoon. Come, Nelly, do, he's been enquiring where 'that other young lady' has disappeared to."

"Pray don't gratify his curiosity."

"You are absolutely cross, Nell," said Esther, "which is next door to a miracle. Come, Maude, what a time you've been settling that hat; there's Mr. Langley and Nora out on the lawn," and away they both ran.

The time seemed long and heavy that long, bright summer afternoon, as I lay with my eyes half shut, dreamily watching the sunbeams streaming across the ceiling, and rippling on the wall, listening to the ticking of my own watch, and the lazy hum of the insects floating in the sunshine without.

About four I heard the rattle of wheels down the avenue, and knew that Aunt Mary had gone out for a drive, imagining, doubtless, I was with the rest of the walking party. Uncle Edward had gone with them to show Mr. Langley the farm. Charles was at home, no doubt, in his own room, but I would not seek him out. I would lie and think with my eyes shut. This dreamy thinking melted into sleep ere long, but

that sleep brought with it a strange and painful nightmare.

It was not a dream; it was too indistinct and shadowy; some vague, indefinable, frightful evil, crushing and overwhelming me, from which I could not escape. Some dark, oppressive sense of great misfortune, not to be explained or discovered, weighing down my faculties with a sense of dread and unutterable distress. It was with a sharp struggle, a desperate wrench of spirit, that I shook off this dark vision, and awoke, panting and frightened to find a cool wind sighing through the open window, the sun hidden behind clouds, and a grey gloom creeping over every thing. I was chilled and depressed; I longed for a familiar face, a kind voice.

I heard footsteps without, and involuntarily ran to the door and opened it to meet them. It was Maude.

“Nelly! why, what is the matter with you? You look scared; what red eyes. Have you been crying, poor little woman?”

I gave a glance at myself in the glass: my hair had become disordered in my restless sleep, and I had been crying without knowing it; my eyes were red, and my cheeks feverishly flushed.

"What a scarecrow I am! I have been asleep, and had a disagreeable dream," I said, pushing back my hair, and pouring out some water to bathe my eyes.

"Poor dear! well, bathe your face, and put on your silk dress that you look so stately in, and come down; tea's nearly ready."

"I never felt less inclined to dress in my life."

"Pshaw! I'll help you," and putting her little plump hands on my shoulders, she seated me in a chair before the glass, and proceeded to brush out and plait my disordered locks with marvellous rapidity.

"There," as she twisted the last into its proper place, "now for your silken robe, and there you are, apparelled like a queen; just put your black jet chain round your white throat, it can bear the contrast."

I stopped her foolish little mouth with a kiss, and after finishing myself according to her commands, sat down to wait till she was ready.

Nora, Esther, and Mr. Langley were all in the drawing room when we went down. He was talking as indefatigable as he had done all day, without any sign of weariness, with the same rough, careless good-humour, Nora and Nest's sweet girlish voices blending with his blunt, manly tones.

"Come and sit here," said he, speaking to both of them, "on this luxurious sofa. Who is it kept sacred for, with its pile of cushions? I am going to make free," and tumbling over the pillows from one end to another, he seated himself and pulled Nora down beside him.

"You will have to resign your seat in a minute," said she, when the proper occupant of the sofa makes his *entrée*."

"And who is he, pray?"

"My brother Charles," said Esther, laughing.

"Your brother; have you really a brother? is he a little boy?"

"No; a young man, and very handsome," returned Nora, shooting a mischevious glance at him from her blue eyes.

"I don't believe that, or I should have seen or heard of him before. And why is he to have the most comfortable place in the room?"

"He is in bad health, poor fellow."

"Oh!" said he, "I like to have a reason for everything; I'll evacuate when he appears;" which he did on Charles's entrance, looking extremely sheepish.

Uncle Edward, who had just came in, rubbing his hands, good-humoured, hospitable, and famishing for tea, introduced them, and Charles had to submit his thin white hand to the gigantic gripe that had nearly dislocated my wrist.

The evening slipped away quickly enough, I thought, even with our usual music and singing, and our guest's hearty fun and loud-voiced merriment. He must have been an appalling person

to live with, were one ill or weary; but just now there was something infectious in his mirth, it was so blithe, so straightforward and sincere, something like the merriment of a child.

Charles did not like him, I fancied; perhaps there was something in his rude health and boisterous spirits that jarred upon the other's delicate frame and easily-wearied nerves. Whatever it might be, Charles shrank from his frank advances, and winced at his loud laughter, and returned brief, cold answers to his blunt speeches.

It was nearly twelve o'clock before he went. The wind had gone down, and it was a fair, still, starlight night. We all went out on the terrace to see him mount the beautiful chesnut mare he had ridden so hard in the morning, and after bestowing on us all a hearty squeeze of the hand and a laughing good night, dashed down the avenue, singing the chorus of a hunting song he had nearly deafened us with in the evening.

“He’s a capital good fellow,” said Uncle Edward.

“Very amusing and good natured,” said Aunt Mary.

“So full of fun,” echoed Maude and Esther.

So I fell asleep that night with Mr. Langley’s praises echoing in my ears, to dream that he was married to Peggy, and that Joe Stevens and Miss Grimston were dancing a hornpipe at their wedding.

CHAPTER II.

MR. LANGLEY came again the next day, and the next. He was such a strange original, and withal so full of fun and good humour, that he became a great favourite with everybody, except me. I scarcely knew whether I liked him or not. My opinion of him changed every hour, and fluctuated like a very weather cock. He was sometimes so blunt and rude that not to feel angry with him was an impossibility, and yet so perfectly honest and fearlessly indifferent that you began to doubt the expediency of being vexed with such an incomprehensible mortal.

He was a great rider, and Maude and Esther, who were fearless horsewomen, used to be his com-

panions in his gallops over the country. Nora was more timid, and seldom went with them, declaring she feared to trust her neck with such a mad trio, and well she might; for their torn and bedragged skirts, and blown horses, showed pretty plainly that their pace was not confined to a ladylike canter.

Mr. Langley, Esther said, used to take them over every gate and fence he came to, invariably riding across the country, and utterly disdaining the high road, a confession which left poor Aunt Mary in a pitiable state of anxiety, whenever they rode out with him.

Strangely enough, he had never asked me to ride, perhaps he did not think I could. It was very absurd of me to feel piqued, especially as I had finally decided (dating from his last rude speech), that I did not like him at all.

One bright afternoon, with a little womanly wish to show him I cared nothing for his neglect of me, I asked Nora if she felt inclined for a ride into Haverford.

"Yes, if you like; I have nothing else to do."

"Ride!" said Mr. Langley, turning upon me with his blunt stare: "are you going for a ride?"

"Yes; why not?"

"I thought—" he began.

"You thought I couldn't, no doubt; you see you have not yet discovered the extent of my talents."

"Then why would you never come with us?" he demanded, in his quick authoritative tones.

"You never asked me, I believe."

"Did I not? what a fool I must have been! Will you come now?—do."

"No, indeed!" interrupted Nora, "not if I am to be of the party; we will have none of your mad, cross-country gallops; Helen and I are going to trot soberly and decorously into Haverford. I have not forgotten how you spoilt two habits for me in ——shire."

"Peace be to their mutilated remains."

"Do relent, Miss Helen, and let me be your

escort. I will ride as soberly as a farmer jogging to market, or a parson to a tithe dinner, if you will only have me."

"Settle it with Nora then," and I hurried up stairs to dress.

Nora followed me in a few minutes, and said ruefully that as Frank was determined to go, we must let him, for peace and quietness sake.

When we came down he was outside, patting the horses and talking to the groom, who was enlarging on the beauties of his own, a powerful black animal.

Charles stood at the open window looking on.

"Isn't this a fine fellow, Brotherton?" called out Frank, patting the horse's nostrils.

"Very—considerably superior to his master in every respect," Charles added in a low tone.

"The stirrups are too long," said Mr. Langley, springing on the horse's back, and purposely, as I fancied, striking the spurs into his sides.

The animal reared bolt upright, and plunged madly. Frank sat him like a centaur, and used

whip and spur till he stood still, his thin nostrils quivering and his sides trembling—but conquered.

“Look at Langley, witching the world with noble horsemanship,” said Charles. “I hate to see a man triumphing over a nobler animal than himself.”

“My dear Charlie, you are terribly severe,” said Nora laughing. “Come, Helen, we must e’en risk our necks.”

Charles followed us out, and after Mr. Langley had placed me on my horse, stood thoughtfully patting its neck and head. It was a pretty gentle creature, with a large mild eye, a particular favourite of his.

“Poor Bess,” said he, as she laid her mouth caressingly on his shoulder: “pretty Bess, take care of your precious burden.”

“Thank you for your good wishes, so flatteringly expressed,” I returned, laughing.

“Won’t you come with us, Brotherton?” said Frank, who was tightening the girth of Nora’s saddle.

"I wish I could," Charles said, colouring, with a sigh.

"Pshaw! man; why can't you? You don't exert yourself half enough. What's to prevent your riding?"

"It tires me so; I am not strong enough. Good-bye, Helen, a pleasant ride to you; don't let that mad braggart break your neck," he added, in a whisper.

"Never fear, Charlie; good-bye."

"Off they goes. A prime bit o' horse-flesh that black 'un, sir," I heard the groom say to Charles as we started.

"Aye," returned he, absently.

"Take care of them, Mr. Langley, for Heaven's sake," poor Aunt Mary's beseeching tones followed us from a bedroom window.

"All right, my dear madam. Hold in your nag's head, Miss Helen, she's got such a sleepy trick of hanging it. I'll show you such a stretch of green sward for a gallop presently."

We had now got outside the avenue gates.

“Touch up your horse, Nora; this delicious air is enough to make one fly.”

“Who was going to ride like a farmer jogging to market, or a parson to a tithe dinner?” said she.

“You are not going to be so barbarous as to insist on a literal fulfilment of that rash promise, I hope. Look at Miss Helen, her heart is shining out at her eyes; she looks quite beautiful,” said this original, looking straight into my face with an undisguised stare of admiration.

“Oh! Frank, rightly named!” laughed Nora, “when you have known this plain spoken gentleman as long as I have, Nell, you will not blush so prettily at his compliments.”

We rode gaily on, through the golden sunshine and the caressing air, vocal with the birds’ music, the sweet joyous influence of the lovely summer time, and the swift exhilarating motion, were like an entrancing spell. My heart danced as lightly as the fluttering leaves that shook and

whispered over us—a joyous flow of spirits I had scarcely ever known before woke up within me as we cantered on through the cool mossy lanes and across the patches of green common, with their pools of clear brown water flashing in the sun, laughing and talking gaily, the sweet air kissing our foreheads and lifting our hair, filling us with a sweet intoxication.

Our cavalier had hitherto been contented with a rapid but tolerably decorous canter; but as we drew near Haverford, a long even stretch of green sward by the road side seemed to rekindle restless ambition within him. After fidgetting in his saddle and hesitating uneasily for a few minutes, he broke forth—

“Miss Helen, doesn’t that delicious smooth bit of green, yonder, make you long to try your steed’s mettle.”

“Against your beautiful, spirited creature? that would be unequal odds.”

“Oh, we would make allowances; come, shall we have a race just to yonder fence, about as far

as you can see, just to quicken our blood a little after this sluggish pace we have been keeping?"

Certainly my ride must have infused an unusual amount of quicksilver into my usual sober composition, for I consented to his mad proposal, in spite of an outburst of entreaty from poor Nora, who, perfectly convinced I should break my neck, most feelingly implored me to let Frank race by himself if he would, and have nothing to do with his insane proposition. But Mr. Langley was a sworn foe to listening or reasoning in any shape, and kept up such a fire of ridicule entreaties and banter, that Nora was fain to resign herself to an inevitable fate, and sit on her saddle with a look of helpless despair.

"Come, Nora, darling: now don't put that dismal look on your pretty face;" thus he coaxed her. "Do you really suppose I won't take care of your sister? Why, I'd just as soon break my own neck as hurt a hair of her head. Come, I know I'm a sad harum-scarum dog, but I'll swear I mean to do nothing foolish now, only a

little bit of a gallop just to stretch the horse's legs. Here comes Selwyn and Robertson," pointing to two officers who were riding towards us from the town, "we'll leave you under their protection; you can canter quietly along the road, and we'll wait for you," and without waiting for another word, he took my horse's bridle and guided it down a slight bank that led to the stretch of common, then exclaiming, "Now for a pair of gloves," put both horses to their full speed.

I remember, as in a bewildered dream, flying over the greensward, the quivering horse-hoofs beating the ground, hearing, as we sped on like the wind, as it seemed to me, confused shouts from the road, and a scream that sounded like Nora's, seeing dimly before me a high fence, hearing Mr. Langley shout (as it seemed from a long way off), "Hold her head in—give her the whip—steady! Well done: bravo, bravo!" and then a quivering shock, and finding myself on the other side, panting and giddy, with poor

Bess trembling and melting under me, but still safe and erect.

As soon as I could re-collect my scattered faculties, and clear my eyes from the confused crowd of objects that whirled and danced before them, I became aware that Frank had dismounted, and was patting Bess's neck, alternately encouraging her and applauding me.

"I never saw a better leap in my life; upon my soul, Miss Helen, you are an absolute trump of a girl—I admire your spirit. Why, you sit on your horse like a—"

"Oh! Mr. Langley, what have you made me do? Let us go home, pray. I must have made a terrible exhibition of myself."

"Exhibition! a very jolly one at all events. By Jove, I never was so astonished and delighted in my life. You took the fence like a heroine, as if you had been brought up to it all your days."

I felt so fluttered and confused, so repentant, so angry with myself and with him, that I had

much ado to help crying. His vehement applause made as much impression on my ears as did the sighing of the winds. I drew down my veil to hide my crimsoned cheeks as Nora and her two cavaliers rode up to us, when I had, of course, to endure a fire of compliments on my courage and skill from both the gentlemen, Frank joining in chorus.

"What a metamorphosis you have wrought, Langley," whispered Capt. Robertson to him, loud enough for me to hear. "Why, man, you are a sorcerer, great as ever was Michael Scott."

"Who, when in Salamanca's cave,
Him listed, his magic wand to wave,
The bells would ring in Notre Dame."

said Mr. Selwyn, who was poetically disposed, and used to contribute to the poet's corner of the *Haverford Mercury*.

"Sorcery! not much of that, I fancy," returned matter-of-fact Frank. "Eh! Nora, you never told me what a jewel your sister was."

But Nora was deeply offended, far beyond the

power of Frank's banter, and informed, me with much stateliness, which confounded me beyond expression, it was a manner so unusual with her, that the next time I meant to ride a steeple-chase, she would thank me to let her know my intentions beforehand, as she had no desire to witness my escapades over fences six feet high.

"Pull up! pull up!" exclaimed Frank, laughing mischevously, "three at the highest."

She saw no amusement in risking life and limb in that manner, and she hated masculine women.

"Come, come! no more of this nonsense," said he, laying an authoritative hand on her horse's bridle, and frowning as he spoke, "drive away those black clouds from your pretty face, they don't become you—and don't pout like a fretful child."

She plucked her bridle from his hand, and sat in silent, proud disdain, her haughty lip curved, and her blue eyes sparkling with anger.

"Well, boot and saddle," exclaimed Mr.

Langley, remounting his horse, (he had been standing all this time with my bridle over his arm), "are we to stand here quarrelling all day? Come, Miss Helen, let you and I set a good example. Forward, gallant knights and ladies fair. Nora, you little vixen, a good gallop will sweep all the cobwebs out of your silly little brain. What, inexorable? Well, I leave you to these two worthy sons of Mars: Selwyn shall spout poetry to you by the yard, and Robertson administer a dose of philosophical doctrines, and if neither of these prescriptions will answer, the deuce is in it."

Thus saying, he spurred his horse a few paces in front of the others, and made Bess spring forward with a smart touch of the whip.

"Now, Miss Helen, forward."

It was in vain I objected that I ought not to leave Nora, who was so angry with me, that I had no fancy for any more fences, and no wish to startle Haverford from its propriety, by dashing through its sober streets at full gallop.

Mr. Langley, whose decided enmity to all opposition I had discovered from the first hour I saw him, impetuously over-ruled all objections, and all hesitation, sweeping them away with his strong, clear, vigorous tones like leaves before the wind.

There was no standing up against his vehement arguments without considerable mental exertion, for which I did not then feel fitted, so nothing was to be done but to sigh and submit.

We swept on at a quick canter, Nora and her escort following more slowly. My cheeks burnt crimson, under my veil, as we reached the town, and rode up the High Street, at the curious glances provoked by the unaccustomed sight of the quiet, demure Miss Marsden riding with a dashing looking stranger.

We met a detachment of soldiers marching in from exercising on the common, with drums and bugles, and had to stand still while they went by. Bess was frightened by the music, and became restive, and Mr. Langley had to dismount and

hold her, encouraging me in his rough, honest tones, greeting all the while his acquaintances among the officers, from whom I had to support a fire of curious glances, at the top of his lungs. This over, a few paces further on, we encountered Bella Leeson (now Mrs. MacAllaster), in her diminutive pony carriage, with Kate by her side, looking a little older than she did six years ago, but merry as ever. For Bella had married in all these years, and instead of the poor half-pay captain's daughter, in the little cottage at Holmsley, was now the pretty wife of Mr. MacAllaster, the rich Scotch banker, of the firm of MacAllaster, MacNab and Co., who fell in love with her pretty face and delicate figure at a party at Mrs. Selwyn's, (who ever since gave herself great credit for having set the match on foot), and took her home to brighten up his dull, square brick mansion, to the great delight and self-glorification of Mrs. Leeson, to whose existence her daughter, Mrs. MacAllaster, became the leading star, her dress, her house, and her

parties, furnishing her with an endless fund of converse.

We saw little of Kate now at Holmsley, she almost lived with her sister, who found herself very lonely, as Kate herself said, while old Mac Allaster, (as she irreverently called her brother-in-law), was in his office. Kate's cheek-bones had grown a little more prominent than of yore, and her shoulders a little sharper.

Bella drew up and greeted us most graciously (it was wonderfully diverting to see how patronising she had become since her marriage), and Kate struck up her usual confidential chatter, every now and then casting furtive glances at Frank through her glass, to his great amusement.

In spite of his fidgetting in his saddle, in an ecstasy of impatience, I was obliged to introduce him, and he and Kate rattled away very amicably for five minutes, when his horse, who partook of his master's nature, got so restless that we were forced to exchange a hurried good-bye and ride on.

I forgot my troubles when we were free of the town, and sweeping along the road, facing the delicious air and sunshine, and my spirits danced as lightly as the wanton summer wind. We rode on to a village two miles beyond Haverford, a pleasant old English village, with a grey, mouldering church, and an ancient ivy-mantled school-house, with a crowd of shouting children playing on the green before it. Here I induced Mr. Langley to slacken our pace, that Nora and Mr. Selwyn (Captain Robertson had bidden them good-bye at Haverford) might come up with us.

Nora had not yet forgotten her anger; she kept a haughty silence and turned a deaf ear to all Frank's blandishments. It was growing towards evening, and after a short consultation, it was mutually agreed (Mr. Langley, of course, not to be convinced) that we ought to turn our horses' heads if we wished to be home in anything like respectable time. Nora avowed she was much too tired to ride fast, so I again found my-

self in advance of the party, with my former companion.

The golden lustre and delicious warmth of the evening filled me with all tender and delicious fancies; even Frank's hearty mirth seemed softened, and his laugh (the most infectious I ever heard, it was so boyish and sincere), took a lower tone. Thus we rode on till we came to a turn in the road, winding up through deep shade and over-hanging foliage, glowing in the mellow light. Frank's quick eye caught that tempting path.

"Look, what a green lane, we can go through Cloverdale wood that way—don't you delight in riding through a wood by this delicious light? Let us cut up here, and cheat Nora and her gallant cavalier—they will think we have eloped," and his hearty laughter rang out on the still evening air.

"But, Mr. Langley, we cannot get home this way, and the sun will soon be down," I objected.

"Yes, yes, we can. I know a short cut

through the wood that brings you out just a mile above Holmsley."

The road was very seducing, and as the sun yet hung above the horizon, I foolishly yielded, and we rode up the lane, Frank mockingly kissing his hand to Nora and Mr. Selwyn, who was shouting after us to know where we were going.

We cantered up the road, which turned off across a common, dotted with clumps of yellow furze shining in the setting sun, and from whence a broad grassy path led into the deep glades of the wood.

Whatever misgivings I may have had respecting the wisdom of the course I had taken with this mad-cap stranger, I had not much time to dwell on them, for he kept up such an incessant fire of jokes and laughter, that it was not easy for me to think at all. The sun was going down gloriously, and the west was piled high with mountains of gorgeous clouds.

"What a trick we've played Nora and Dick Selwyn," said he exultingly, startling the still-

ness of the quiet wood with his joyous laugh. "Why they'll ride home and swear I've run away with you, Miss Helen! Ha, ha! fancy everybody's horror and dismay—old Brotherton's jolly face purple with rage, and he, seizing his gun and rushing out burning with vengeance to pursue the culprits! Imagine all the village roused up, constables sent for from Haverford, George Tremordyn, that grim parson, galloping off in pursuit, all the clodpoles on the farm dispersing over the country to look for us. Imagine the screaming and fainting among the ladies, and Charlie, poor lad, only conceive his horror!"

The picture amused him so intensely that he laughed till he was nearly falling from his horse, and there was something so irresistibly catching in his mirth that I was forced to follow his example, and laugh till I could laugh no longer.

All this time we were quite forgetting to mark our road, and after winding for some time longer through green paths, overhung by long sprays of

wild roses, where we had to ride one by one, and crossing wide open glades, traversed by the gnarled and moss grown roots of "tall ancestral trees," where the violets clustered brightly in spring, we were forced to stop and ponder among the diversity of paths that branched off in every direction, which one we ought to take.

Frank reined in his horse, and looked puzzled.

"At fault at last, Mr. Langley," I said, glancing with very uncomfortable misgivings at his perplexed face.

"Hum—slightly," he acknowledged.

"We ought never to have come this way," I exclaimed mournfully; this wise reflection coming, like many others, too late. "It will be a dark night too."

The sun had sunk, and a grey haze was creeping over the sky, giving no promise of a moon.

"Oh! you must not get faint-hearted," returned he, confidently, "we'll find the way, never fear; keep up your spirits, all will come right."

He dismounted, and tying his bridle to a

bough of a tree, swung himself nimbly up to the top, and took a survey of our position. It was not a very encouraging one, for he descended with a shake of his head, and a forced laugh that spoke volumes.

“I am really afraid, Miss Marsden, that my joke will turn out to be earnest; but what if we are bewildered in the wood? it will only be a romantic adventure, and the greatest risk we shall run will be catching a cold. But come, courage, we’ll explore some of these paths, and see what they lead to. I cannot imagine how I could have missed this short cut, but these paths must lead to somewhere.”

So drawing his horse’s bridle over one arm, and leading mine with the other, he plunged into one of the tracks, talking all the while gaily and confidently, as if to keep up my courage, and turning our misadventure into a capital joke. That the path led ultimately to somewhere I have no doubt, but where that was we ran a risk of never discovering, for it only seemed to plunge

deeper into the recesses of the wood, and the thickening twilight soon convinced us that it would be rash and hopeless to try to penetrate further.

With some trouble we found our way back to the open glade we had left, and then sat looking at each other with hopelessly perplexed faces, and then a sense of the absurdity of our position struggling through our annoyance, involuntarily broke into a fit of laughter. But our laughter sounded ghostly in that shadowy wood, with night coming on, and a rising wind moaning among the branches. The light and warmth and glory of the evening had faded, the moon hid her face, and the sky frowned upon us. My feelings had changed, I was tired, chilled, and miserable; it grew so dark I could scarcely see my companion's face, as he lifted me tenderly from my saddle, and placing me tenderly on the thick gnarled root of an old tree, stripped off his coat, in spite of all my entreaties and protestations, threw it over me, wrapping the sleeves

round my throat with all gravity; then sitting down by me in his shirt-sleeves, did his utmost to cheer and encourage me, vowing it was a most exciting adventure, and only needed an armed knight to emerge from the darkness and dare him to mortal combat for my sake, to be exactly like an episode in the days of chivalry.

“We only want a little light to fight him by,” continued he, in his brave, clear, cheery voice, drawing my arm through his and patting my hand encouragingly “pity it’s so confoundedly dark. Cheer up, Miss Marsden, Dick Selwyn saw the road we turned up, and they’ll be sending out to search for us; so you see, my prophecy will prove true,” and he laughed gaily.

His inexhaustible spirits cheered me for a while, but ere long, he evidently began to feel the dismal influences of the time and place, his laugh grew shorter and less frequent; it was very cold too, every rush of wind made our teeth chatter dismally.

The thought of what Aunt Mary would think

of me, the grief and alarm I should cause at home by my folly, was foremost in my mind, and keenly distressed me, more than the gusts of the moaning wind.

My companion's tone changed perceptibly; I heard him vehemently reproaching himself for his folly in bringing me into the wood, and earnestly imploring me not to give way.

"I don't care for myself, but it makes me mad that you should suffer through my foolery. I would give my right hand to get you safely out of this unlucky scrape. Twice to-day I shall have risked your life through my cursed foolhardiness."

He had placed his arm round my waist protectingly, and I was weak and cowardly enough not to withdraw from it. In a moment he spoke again, but his voice sounded confusedly in my ears, and the exertion of answering had become painful. A sort of stupor of cold and nervousness weighed down my senses. I felt my head drop on his shoulder. A minute or two of unconscious-

ness followed, then I roused myself by a desperate effort, to hear dimly his voice calling me.

"Helen, Helen! Good God! she is dying of cold; I am her murderer. Speak to me, Helen."

His terror-struck voice, and his rough moustache on my cheek, for I believe he must have tried kissing me as a desperate means of revival, armed me for a sharper struggle with my weakness. I sat up, and then there came a sound through the branches different from the wind.

"There's a shout, thank God!"

He sprang to his feet, and putting his hand to his mouth sent forth a stentorian halloo.

A moment of keen suspense followed, and then there came an answering shout, and another, and another. In the breathless excitement of conflicting hope and fear, I sprang to my feet, and listened with beating heart and straining ears. Another shout was borne upon the wind, it came nearer, a light began to flash through the trees, and after a few anxious moments, guided by Frank's shouts, the rough red head of

Joe Stevens emerged from the darkness, his bristly locks seeming to glow with supernatural intensity of colour in the flashing of the torch he carried. Frank hailed this apparition with a tremendous shout of delight that made the oaks around us ring.

"We've found thee at last then," said Joe, swinging up his torch so as to cast its full light on our faces, and scratching his head with a look of intense satisfaction.

"Ay, thank God, my lad, is there anybody else looking for us?"

"There's enow of 'em, I trow; all the farm-chaps and most all the village beside."

"Oh, Mr. Langley, what will they think of us," I said, half sinking with shame and vexation.

"Pshaw, never fear," said he, laughing, as he lifted me on my horse, "we'll put a brave face on it, and they'll forget to scold us in the joy of seeing us safe. But isn't it queer how my prophecy has been accomplished?"

I was too weary and miserable to laugh: Joe mounted Frank's horse and rode slowly in front, holding up his torch to pilot us, while Frank himself walked behind leading Bess, and supporting me in the saddle with his arm.

"Were they all very much frightened at home, Joe?" I ventured to ask, as we wound slowly on through a mass of intricate paths, who seemed familiar acquaintances of our fiery-headed guide.

"Ah!" returned he, stolidly.

"What did they say about it; did you hear anything," demanded Frank, "speak out, can't you?"

"Measter were proper angry," said Joe, with a dry chuckle, "and Miss Nora came home in a mortal fright, as I heard."

Here he reposed his jaws after the fatigue of so long a sentence.

"Well, I were in the kitchen, takin' my tea, when Peggy came down crying like mad, that young Measter had took and run away with Miss Helen. Old Measter fell into a mortal rage,

as I s'pose, and we was all sent out to look for ye. 'Twas I fust that ax a' the wood."

"You're a clever chap, Joe, and deserve credit for your talents, so here's something to buy your sweetheart a ribbon, and to hold your tongue at the same time," said Frank, slipping some money into his hand, which Joe acknowledged with a delighted chuckle, and a twitch of his red forelock.

We saw more lights flitting through the darkness, and the distant sound of men's voices.

"Why, the whole parish is on the look out for us," said Frank, laughing.

"Ah!" responded Joe, "I mun gi'e 'um notice, that I've found thee," and he fell to waving his torch and shouting like a madman: "hi—halloa—Stubbs—Jackson—here, I have found the run-aways."

"Hear what the rascal calls us," muttered Frank to me, "I've half a mind to thrash him. You are not crying, Miss Helen," his careless tone changing to one of earnest concern. "Good

Heaven, what an unlucky dog I am to have caused you all this vexation and misery; cheer up, I implore you; it's all right now, we are clear of this confounded wood, (I wish every stick of it was burnt to the ground), and I'll bear the brunt of Mr. Brotherton's anger. See, here we are at the road."

As he spoke we came out on the open common, and saw a group of two or three horsemen a little way off, looming black through the darkness.

From bye lanes, and different parts of the wood, came little parties of men in twos and threes, carrying torches, and laughing in undertones at what must have been to them an admirable joke.

There was a universal shout as we approached led in triumph by Joe, who seemed in the highest state of felicitation at his cleverness in finding the culprits, and kept chuckling and waving his torch in a state of ferocious exultation.

By the sight of the torches which most of the men carried, for the night was intensely dark, I

saw that Mr. Tremordyn was among the riders. Uncle Edward, his tall, stout, portly figure looming gigantic in the flickering glare, rode up to us, and turning upon Frank, furiously demanded what he had been doing with me.

"We were trying a short cut through the wood, Mr. Brotherton, and lost our way; the blame is entirely mine, and I most deeply regret my folly," said Frank, in a tone of school-boy penitence.

"Devil a doubt of it, Sir," thundered Uncle Edward, who was in a towering passion, and with good cause, as I felt remorsefully, "who doubts the blame was yours. I was a confounded old blundering fool, Sir, a d——d old ass, (Uncle Edward never swore but under tremendous provocation) to trust any of my lasses with such a hare-brained young scape-grace. A short cut through the wood, eh? and a d——d long cut you've made of it. And as for you, lass— why, Lord help us," as the light fell on my face, "what's this, she's as white as the driven snow!

What have you been doing to her, you young villain. Why, Lord bless my soul!"

Uncle Edward shot out these words in an absolute fever of excitement and indignation.

"It's only the cold, uncle," I forced myself to say, half sinking with shame and weariness; "it came on so dark that we could not find our way, and had to sit—"

"Under a tree, like the babes in the wood, eh? We should have found you to-morrow covered with leaves. Why, Lord bless me, you've terrified 'em all out of their seven senses. Nora came galloping home with Selwyn, swearing that this young scape-grace had run off with you. But come, touch up your nags, for the love of mercy, the child looks half dead. Fall in behind, lads," said he, speaking to the labourers, "and put out some of your lights, or folks will think the French have landed. Thou must all go into the kitchen, and get supper, when we come to the house. Ride on, Tremordyn, there's a good fellow, and tell 'em all's right. Come,

Madam Nell," taking my horse's bridle, "if I let thee go out of my sight again, may I be pounded in a mortar. Keep up thy spirits, lass, a bit longer," patting my hand kindly, "we'll soon be home, and I'll leave it to the women to scold thee."

Frank, who had remounted his horse, whispered to me, "It serves me right that I must give up my place at your side," and reining back his horse, fell behind.

"Is Aunt Mary very angry, uncle?" I ventured to ask, as we rode on quickly, he still keeping a strong hold on my bridle, as if I should slip away and escape him by some supernatural means.

"Angry? I believe you. Ah! did'st think we were going to let thee slip out of our fingers so easily?"

It was a great relief to see him returning to his usual hearty humour.

"Dear Uncle, you did not really think—"

"What didn't I really think, that it was like

thee to go running away from us? No, I didn't, lassie, to speak God's truth; but then who could tell whether yonder crazy-brained madcap (he's close behind, I hope he may hear every word), might not be running off with thee against thy will? And now, where's the doctor?" continued Uncle Edward, staring about him into the gloom. "Dr. Stirling, poor man, who came up to take his tea with us in a neighbourly way, when he heard the rumpus he must needs mount his old brown nag, and came off with us to look for the runaways. Hallo doctor—doctor, man," continued he, shouting out into the darkness, "where are ye? As I hope to be saved, he must have ridden into a ditch, and we never knew it."

"The doctor's coming up, sir," shouted one of the men, who were following us with a steady tramp, their figures indistinctly shown by the light of the torches: "he stopped a bit at old Susan Jennings."

The old doctor had taken advantage of our temporary halt on the common to pay a flying

visit to a patient, who lived on the borders of it, and who was now heard urging on his mare to overtake us.

As we waited for him Frank rode close to me, and whispered, "Good night, Miss Helen; may I come to-morrow to ask you how you are?" and without pausing for my answer, he reined his horse aside to ride down the turn of the road that led to Haverford.

"Halloa, Sir," shouted Uncle Edward, who only just then perceived Frank's movements, having been occupied in shouting to the doctor, "where are you going to?"

"Home, sir," returned Frank, bluntly.

"Home, quoth he! That's not the road home, you've taken the wrong turn."

"My home for the present, sir, is Mrs. Ruggle's inn, at Haverford, and this is the road thither, I believe."

"That may be, my friend, but you won't sleep at Mother Ruggle's to-night, so turn thy beast's head and come along with us. You're a fine

fellow to take a fair lassie into a wood, and lose her there, and then gallop off without even seeing her safe home. Come, man, never look glum for a few quick words; I confess I was in a terrible passion with thee just now, thou must forget and forgive."

"With all my heart, sir," said Frank, with his blithe laugh, as he turned his horse, and rode back to my side.

"Well, doctor," said Uncle Edward, as Dr. Stirling came chattering up to us, "we've found 'em you see. Joe found 'em benighted; Lord bless you, in the thickest part of the wood. He's a sharper chap than I took him for, that Joe, he deserves an increase of wages."

"And what do you deserve, eh, Miss Helen?" demanded Dr. Stirling. "A pretty pair of turtle doves to sit cooing in a wood at ten o'clock at night. So you wanted to run away from us, did you?"

"No! indeed, doctor, we only thought——"

"That there was a short cut through Clover-

dale Wood, my good sir," said Uncle Edward.

"Lord bless their innocent hearts," responded the doctor, "never trust 'em, Mr. Brotherton, never trust 'em, their sex are all alike; who'd have thought that Carry Ramsbottom, the prettiest girl in Devonshire, would have run away with that good-looking rascal of an attorney's clerk—but she did."

"And you've never trusted a woman since? Well, well, you're right, you're right, doctor, they lead us all by the nose. Cheer up, lassie, we're not far from home now. She must be fit to drop, poor thing; doctor, you must prescribe for her when we get her safe back."

I was so tired, and chilled, and giddy, that I remembered nothing more distinctly of that weary ride through the darkness, till we reached the house, and the light and warmth of the hall burst upon us. I have a dim recollection of Frank lifting me from my horse and carrying me in, for I felt as helpless as an infant, of a crowd of eager faces surrounding us, and a buzz of voices all asking

questions at once, of Uncle Edward calling to them to put some life into me first, and scold me afterwards, of being caught in Aunt Mary's arms, and then a strange dizziness and forgetfulness of everything.

I awoke again on the sofa in my room, with Peggy standing over me like a dragon, waiting for the first glimpse of consciousness to pour some hot white-wine whey down my throat, Maude and Aunt Mary rubbing my chilled feet and hands, and everybody ministering most tenderly and sedulously to my comfort. Uncle Edward must have explained everything, for I met no frightened or reproachful looks—nothing but loving anxiety; and was soon revived enough to sit up and drink some of Peggy's hot draught, and laugh at my disasters. Maude busied herself with pulling off my habit, wrapping me up in a dressing-gown, and drying and gathering up my hair, which had fallen down, and hung, wet with dew, loosely about my neck.

Then Aunt Mary, seeing me revived, left me with a kiss to the care of my other nurses, and hurried down stairs with Peggy to see after the gentlemen, who were attacking a substantial mixture of dinner and tea, while the labourers were supping in the kitchen.

On her departure, Nora and Esther, who evidently had some idea of grave responsibility weighing on their minds, and doubtless thinking me now strong enough to bear scolding, commenced a very reproachful lecture on my folly and heedlessness, till seeing me weak enough to cry a little, they both instantly fell to kissing away my tears, and petting me most industriously, declaring that after all it wasn't my fault, and that only that crazy mad-cap Frank was to blame; and, finally, that I had gone through quite enough to day.

By the time that was settled, Peggy appeared with my dinner, which I felt too sleepy and weary to touch; and Maude persuaded Nora and Esther to go down stairs to their tea, and shut-

ting the door after them, exulted in having me all to herself. After eating a few mouthfulls of chicken to please her, and relieve the faintness that began to creep over me, again I lay back in the sofa, which was so soft to my stiff and tired frame, and the bright fire so cozy and warm, that in about five minutes I fell asleep.

But I was too weary to sleep soundly, and ere long, an uneasy dream seized me, and I awoke with a start, to meet Charlie's eyes, who was standing beside me. I think he had kissed me, but it might have been a dream.

"Charlie, you came very late to welcome me after my perils," I said, rousing myself with a smile.

"I waited till Tremordyn came, 'fiery red with speed,' to tell us you were safe, and then retreated to my own sanctorum. I am only in the way in a bustle."

He sat down beside me, and leaning his arm over the head of the sofa, took my hand in his.

"Scold her, Charlie," said Maude.

"I am going to. Why did you frighten us so, Helen?"

"Why, indeed. No amount of scolding would be too great for me."

"I had a presentiment of evil when I saw you ride away with that Bedlamite."

"She shan't go with him again without me," said Maude, with the prettiest air of soberness and protection imaginable.

"I firmly believe he meant to carry you off, and overreached himself by getting lost in Cloverdale wood—my benison on every tree of it."

"Pshaw! Charlie, such romantic proceedings are not for the nineteenth century," I said, laughing in spite of my weariness. "Why should he want to carry me off?"

"Well, promise me you will not ride alone with him again," said Charles entreatingly.

"Papa will take care of that," said Maude laughing.

"Yes, indeed, I promise very willingly. Will that and my penitence satisfy you?"

"It must, I suppose," said he with a sigh.

His earnest half-reproachful gaze was painful to me, I scarcely knew why. I shrank from it, and turned my head on the cushions.

"She is so tired, poor darling," said Maude. "I am going to put her bed; you must go, Charlie."

As she spoke, Aunt Mary came in.

"Charlie, how did you gain admittance," said she, going up to him with a shake of the head, and placing her hand on his shoulder.

"Through the door, mother."

"It is growing late, you should be in bed, foolish lad. How pale you look; has your head been aching again, dearest?"

"No."

"Don't try to deceive me, Charlie; I see it in your face, you had no rest last night."

"How can you tell? mother, you are a sorceress."

"Do you think I don't know? Go, Charlie; I must put my other charge here to bed."

“My mother is jealous, Helen; she will never let me talk to you,” he said, with his peculiarly sad smile: “so good night, and happy dreams.”

He went, and Aunt Mary listened to his languid step down the passage till it could be heard no longer, with a strange, troubled look. But I did not ponder on the look that night, I was too worn out, and no sooner was I laid in bed than I fell (from a high precipice, as it seemed), into a restless, tumbling sea of dreams.

CHAPTER III.

I WAS well enough the next morning to go down, (a little later than usual), and on meeting Mr. Langley, who had slept at our house, to return a merry greeting to his eager enquiries after my well-doing, and laugh at his blunt compliments on my bravery.

Dr. Stirling, too, came trotting up to the house on his old brown mare, Nan, to inquire after the scapegraces, and to know if I wanted any of his prescriptions.

“Why, I thought you’d be in bed to-day,”

said he, regarding me with a stare of wonderment.

“And calculated on having me for a patient, no doubt, doctor? You see I have escaped your talons.”

“My talons, eh? well, never mind, you will be wanting ’em yet, mark my words. How do you feel, chilled—stiff—feverish?”

“Not a bit, doctor; a little chilled perhaps, but nothing else.”

“Well, well, I’ll send you a dose to-night; now, don’t speak, it’s all settled, and lucky you ought to think yourself that you may get off with a dose after all your pranks in a damp wood at night time.”

“Very true, Sir,” said Frank, gravely: “we are going to cut our wisdom teeth, both Miss Marsden and I.”

“Glad to hear it young gentleman, but I fancy they’ll be a lang time coming through. Bless my soul!” exclaimed the doctor, suddenly starting up. “Who’s this coming up the

avenue? A woman, with a stride like a horse-marine! It's that female creature—that sphynx—that incubus—that nightmare!”

It was Miss Grimston on whom he lavished these complimentary epithets. She was striding up the avenue, tight, spare, and grim, with the never failing black and white shawl, and upright black bonnet, umbrella and bundle in hand. The doctor fidgetted, and looked absolutely nervous.

“I must run out the back way; I can't face that woman! I've known many different species of woman—giggling women, grave women, crabbed women, good-humoured women, silent women, and chattering women, but such a specimen of the female kind as that one I never saw before. Why she'll hurry poor Mary Tremordyn into her grave if she stays much longer. Here she comes! I wish you joy of her; I'm off down the kitchen stairs,” and seizing his hat and stick, he absolutely ran out of the room.

His horror of the approaching visitor was so

ludicrously genuine, that Frank shouted with laughter, and had scarcely time to get his countenance into a decorous state, before she was shown in.

This was her farewell visit, she gruffly informed us, the moment she had taken a chair, and deposited her umbrella and bundle on another. She had sent her boxes on before on a wheelbarrow with an idle young rascal of a village lad, that wanted to charge double what he ought; and she herself was going to walk in to Haverford, to catch the coach. She had not thought to leave so soon, but her sister-in-law (unhappy woman), expected her confinement shortly, and Miss Grimston must, of course, be with her to look after things, and to see that the servants—idle hussies—did their business.

Hereupon Frank, whose highly-amused and half-bewildered face kept me in a terribly nervous state lest he should burst forth again, observed that it was a long walk for a lady to take alone; to which Miss Grimston replied

with a snort, "that thank her stars she had the use of her legs, and could walk as well as anybody in England, and as for being afraid, she would like to see the man who would insult Sarah Grimston, especially while she had her umbrella with her."

This excited Frank's risible nerves to such an extent that after a desperate struggle he had such a terrible fit of coughing, as to be forced to rush out and stamp on the terrace, when he went off into such a shout, as covered me with confusion. Luckily, Miss Grimston's attention was slightly diverted from the medley of extraordinary sounds, produced by the struggle between coughing and laughing, by the appearance of Aunt Mary and Esther, whom Miss Grimston turned upon, and gruffly demanded what she was going to be married for?

Esther didn't know—what a strange question.

Her blushes and her half-laughing confusion at this straight-forward demand, were a pretty sight to see.

“Because, if you are, all I can tell you is, you’re a great fool, that’s all,” said Miss Grimston, nodding her black bonnet at her. “You’re much better as you are, I can tell you, and you ought to know it. Bless my stars! Look at me, I never married, I knew better. Ain’t I much better as I am?”

This was a problem rather hard of solution—we fell to considering it with puzzled faces.

“Of course I am,” resumed Miss Grimston triumphantly, “anybody but a fool may see that! No, I never married, I kept my independence, and I mean to keep it. What’s a woman worth without her independence?”

“Not much, certainly, Madam,” said Frank, who had now returned with a penitent face, and sat down as if stoutly determined to be agreeable, to make up doubtless for his recent misbehaviour.

“No, indeed, Sir,” answered Miss Grimston turning sharply on him. “Whatever your name may be, I havn’t the pleasure of knowing.

Our independence is all we poor women have, and of course you men always try to defraud and cheat us of it."

Frank gave alarming indications of bursting out again. I began to speculate whether anybody did try to deprive Miss Grimston of the independence she seemed to prize so highly.

"You have no very flattering opinion of the male sex, Miss Grimston," said Aunt Mary, laughing.

"No, ma'am," returned that lady, tightening her bonnet strings till I thought they must infallibly choke her, "I havn't. I've lived forty-four years in the world, and seen a good many men, and know 'em pretty well. My father was a man, so was my brother." These indisputable facts she affirmed with an air of obstinate experience. "My brother was like all the rest of 'em; he married the poor, silly chit I'm going to nurse now. He's a poor curate down in Norfolk, and they've nine children to bring up on a hundred a-year. I should say they are about as

strong an example of the folly and wickedness of getting married as one need have."

"Then you won't allow," said Aunt Mary, "that their trials and sorrows are any the lighter for being borne together, and that their joys are the sweeter for being shared with one another."

"No; indeed I won't; I am really astonished to hear a sensible, experienced woman like you talk such ridiculous stuff. You must have been married a good many years, too, long enough to know better."

"Seven and twenty," said Aunt Mary, with her sunshiny smile.

"Humph! you must be pretty sick of it," returned our visitor; "there's George Tremordyn, now," falling back on her old topic with a grim relish, "there's a man for you, as proud and obstinate as Lucifer. Why, I'm the only person in the world, I believe, who dare stick up to him. As for Mary—"

"You will not place her, I hope, amongst your examples of the folly of marrying," said Aunt

Mary, something of the mother's anxiety on her face.

"That's as may be," retorted Miss Grimston, snapping her up very short; "anyhow I suppose, she'd have been fifty times wiser never to have married George. Why, bless my stars, just see her looking so pale and frightened out of her senses if he stays out a little later than usual, or pining like a sick chicken if he speaks sharply to her. Pish! I have no patience with such rubbish."

She jerked out the last words with a ferocious suddenness that made us all jump, and then rose gathering her shawl tight round her, and arming herself with umbrella and bundle.

"Well, I'm off: I've four miles to trudge, and shall be missing the coach by dawdling here," eyeing Esther and I as though she thought it all our fault; "good-bye, young ladies; I shall find I suppose when I come here again that you've both pushed your heads into the collar, and that

there are two more fools in the world, which is over-stocked already."

With this cordial farewell, she gathered up her skirts, loosened the fastenings of her umbrella preparatory to unfurling it as a defence against the sun, and prepared to depart. To my utter bewilderment, Frank offered to escort her, protesting gallantly that he could not think of allowing her to walk such a distance alone. Miss Grimston resisted stoutly at first the notion of being indebted to man for protection; but Frank insisted, I am afraid for pure love of mischief, and finally put an end to the contest, by seizing umbrella and bundle, slinging them over his shoulder and making off down the avenue, when Miss Grimston impelled by the fear of losing her property, was forced to stride after him.

There was something so exquisitely absurd in his mirthful mischievous face glancing back at us, with eyes brimful of laughter, as he strode on by her side, the umbrella across his shoulder and the bundle dangling from it, setting at

nought all her efforts to get her property into her own hands, that Aunt Mary, Esther and I laughed till we could laugh no more.

Then Aunt Mary said what a wild, blithe-hearted, merry fellow he was, and I wondered afterwards what made her give me such a bright, loving smile, and such a motherly kiss as she said so. I don't know why I was so happy that day and many succeeding days, and weeks, but it seemed as if I had lost all mournful memory of the past, all haunting dread of the future, and lived only and luxuriated in the bright present; my spirits danced like birds on the witching summer air, and glowed in the ripe, delicious sunshine, and revelled in the beauty of green old Holmsley, in its mossy woods and running streams, and daisied meadows.

The bright summer days danced quickly by in the bustle of preparation that the quietest wedding—and Esther's was to be a very quiet one—brings with it.

Frank—it seems so much more natural to call

him that than anything else—was still at Haverford. He had been invited to stay for Nest's wedding, and he spent almost every day with us, and in our rides, drives, and pic-nics, he was such an indefatigable, merry, original companion, that he won golden opinions from everybody. I liked his bold careless bearing, the keen half-defiant glance of his blue eye, his quick, manly stride, his longing for action, his honest love of all that was high and noble, his irresistibly catching laughter that seemed to break from a heart that had never known care. Poor Frank! noble, untaught, deeply wronged heart. Through the mists of years your spirit looks on me with reproachful eyes, yet you have forgiven me long since, I trust, in Heaven. We had long known our guest's short story—Frank was an orphan; his father was an old naval officer, killed at the battle of Trafalgar; his mother died when he was a child, and he had been educated by Mrs. Clayton, his rich childless aunt.

In spite of all his vehement protestations, he

and I were never permitted to ride alone together, Maude, Nora, or sometimes Uncle Edward always going with us as a safeguard. Esther's gallops were over. Mr. Warrington held violent motion in abhorrence, as a dignified British merchant should do, and looked upon Frank as a half savage, a wild, reckless, revolutionary character, who was for upsetting all old and respectable institutions. He took inexpressible pains to keep Nest and him apart, always breaking in upon their conversation with some strong opinion expressed in a dignified manner, and interposing his stately person between them, whenever they came too close together, to that incorrigible Frank's intense amusement.

About this time, Mr. and Mrs. Warrington, senior, came down to Holmsley, a very pompous old gentlemen, also a Russell-square merchant, and his wife, a very grand old lady, the very rustling of whose stiff silk dress inspired awe, and whose favourite topic of converse was the

deeds of her ancestors, who had shed their best blood for the house of Stuart. She patronised us all with serene dignity, and confounded Uncle Edward to the last degree by her laborious condescension. She treated Nest with a sort of half contemptuous kindness, as a pretty little thing enough, but hardly fitted to be the wife of such an elaborate model of perfection as her son; and never lost an occasion of impressing upon her with much solemnity what a weight of dignity and responsibility would accumulate on her youthful shoulders when she entered the noble house of Warrington.

Esther laughed it all off bravely; but I could not help wondering how this bright, sunny-hearted creature would prosper in her new existence among these good, stately, pompous folks; and fearing lest the fair flower should be nipped by the untimely frost of that strange, cold atmosphere.

But Esther had no such misgivings; she was married, and went away with her husband (I

think he really loved her much), with the love-light shining in her eyes, and all bright delicious hopes sparkling through tears, on her sweet face. All love and blessings went with her, and how sorely we missed her bright presence many a day after. Then the old lady and gentleman took their departure for Brighton to our intense relief, and gave us liberty to fall back again into our old, easy, happy, free, existence.

It seemed an understood thing now, that Frank should spend every day with us, and the established intimacy seemed so familiar and pleasant a thing, that I don't think any of us troubled ourselves to ascertain the reason of it. I was musing over that one evening as I sat idly trying a song at the piano; Frank was out shooting with Uncle Edward, and only Charles was in the drawing-room besides myself. I cannot tell what made me choose so melancholy an air, for I was in no mournful mood. Perhaps the murmur of the evening wind and the whis-

per of the leaves without sounded like a lament, for both words and music were sad enough.

“ The shadows are closing fast, mother,
On a day that comes no more ;
I shall never see another—
My weary life is o'er !

“ Life is heavy and sore, mother :
In the grave is quiet sleep.
That sea without a shore, mother,
How calm it is, and deep.”

A sigh close to my shoulder, made me start ; Charles had risen from the sofa where he had been lying, and come noiselessly behind me : “ A mournful ditty, Charlie.”

“ Go on.”

“ What, will you more of it ? ”

“ In vain for rest and peace, mother,
My troubled soul did crave :
But the struggle now may cease, mother—
There's quiet in the grave ! ”

“ I will have no more of this melancholy strain, Charlie. I cannot tell what made me choose it. Forget it, and look, what an evening. A sky,

as pure as silver, and the red rim of the August moon just tipping the hills with flame."

"But there is something sad and solemn in this grey twilight falling over the world, and these leaves whispering and sighing, and your dirge went well with it."

"You shall hear no more; you are too like Jacques, who 'can suck melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs.'"

He made no answer.

"Eh, Charles? Tell me why you have avoided me so perseveringly lately?" leaning as I spoke, half jestingly, my head against his shoulder, as he sat behind me.

Still he did not answer, but I felt his frame quiver strangely, as if some strong agitation shook it.

"Well, am I not worthy of a reply?"

"I have not avoided you, surely?"

"Indeed, you have. It seems to me that we have been like strangers lately, meeting seldom, and speaking still seldomer."

"Is that my fault, Helen?" he said, sadly enough.

"Perhaps I may take to myself a small share of blame, Charlie. We have lived out of doors of late I think."

"And on horseback."

"While you have taken to secluding yourself even more than you were wont to do."

"Musing over the demolition of very glowing castles in the air. Being fool enough to build them up, I deserve to see them crumble into ashes at my feet."

"Well, let them go, Charlie, and look reality bravely in the face."

"I wish I had the courage," he said, with a sigh, and another and a stronger shiver.

"You are not well, I am sure. How cold your hand is."

It felt like ice, and as the light of the rising moon fell on his pale features I was startled by the look that sat upon them, a look of some deep, undermining sorrow, gnawing and fretting within.

He shrank from my glance, and going back to the sofa threw himself on it, and lay with his hands over his eyes, as though to shut out the light.

But Frank came in, and his blithe presence seemed to light up the room, and banish all melancholy shadows. They had had capital sport; Uncle Edward had stopped at the rectory about some parish business, and would have tea there, and so we were not to wait; and he had brought a string of partridges and pheasants to console us for the want of him all day.

I stood at the window looking out on the still solemn beauty of the night, that lay like a spell over the earth. Shelley's exquisite lines rose to my lips, half unconsciously—

“That orbid maiden, with white fire laden,
That mortals call the moon,
Glides glimmering o'er my fleece-like floor,
By the midnight breezes strewn.”

Frank was listening close behind me.

“How beautiful!” said he, in a tone of boyish admiration, as I went on; “do say them again.”

To humour him I complied. "I never heard verses like that. Who's are they?"

"Shelley's; they are part of his poem 'The Cloud.'"

"I thought they were yours, perhaps."

"Mine, indeed! I am no poetess, Mr. Langley."

"You might be anything you liked, I believe," rejoined he, in a tone of perfect good faith.

"Don't forfeit my good opinion by learning to flatter."

"Flatter! I never knew how to, upon my word; I only say what I think right out. Where do you think I went to this morning, Miss Helen?"

"This morning? I really can't guess; to Haverford."

"What a capital guesser you are; and where in Haverford?"

I guessed the barracks, Captain Robertson's lodgings, the inn, Mrs. Selwyn's, the pastry cook's, all to no purpose, he laughing like a school-boy at every failure. I must give it up.

"Well then, to the jeweller's; ay, I thought you would stare."

"To get your watch mended, or regulated, or—"

"Not a bit, you're all wrong. Look here;" and he drew a little leather case from his pocket, opened it, and showed me a very handsome bracelet coiled up within on its bed of white satin.

"How very handsome," I said, as he took it out.

"Very grand, isn't it? Old Hobbs said it was the last fashion. Well, I bought it for my sister."

"Your sister! I did not know you had one."

"I may have ten for ought you know," said he, laughing at my mystified face.

"Certainly you may," I answered doubtfully, for Nora had often told me his history, and never spoke of his having either brother or sister.

"I am very glad you will allow me to have

one; just let me put it on your arm, to judge how it will look on hers; she is about your size," he said, struggling to suppress his laughter, as if conscious of some excellent joke, while he clasped it round my wrist. "Bravo! it really looks beautiful; doesn't it? So beautiful that it is a terrible pity to take it off again."

"And your sister: what would she do?"

"She'll bear it with christian fortitude. So you really believed me, Miss Helen; my sister is a humbug—an imposition; I never had one. The bracelet was made for the little slender white wrist that wears it now." He took up my hand and kissed it, as he spoke. I was so confounded at first that his meaning did not immediately strike me; then I felt angry at his freedom, and unclasping the bracelet, told him coldly that he was mistaken in me.

He did not give me time to finish the sentence. "So you are too proud to wear it?" he said, taking it from my hand: "well, never mind, I will wait till I have a right to clasp it on."

“And who will give you the right?” I asked, offended, and yet half diverted at his coolness.

“You yourself, perhaps. What,” he added impatiently, “you are not blind or deaf? you must see, you must know — Good heavens, Brotherton, what’s the matter?”

I believe we had both utterly forgotten that Charles was present, till we were startled by that sharp, sudden, painful cry.

I flew to him, but to my terrified enquiries he could return no answer, his face was hidden in his hands, and his whole frame quivering as in the struggle with some keen, overmastering agony. Presently he muttered faintly that it was only one of those terrible sudden pains in the head, to which he was sometimes subject; then rising, he made a few wavering steps towards the door, but his exhausted strength failed, he tottered and would have fallen if Frank had not caught and laid him on the sofa.

He pressed both hands to his forehead with a

faint groan of mental and physical agony that wrung my heart to hear.

"Don't leave me, Helen," he entreated, in his faint, exhausted voice.

"No, Charlie, I am here."

Frank had rushed out for water, and now returned with it with a look of honest concern in his handsome face; he knelt down beside the sofa, and with a few kind encouraging words proceeded to loosen Charles's cravat, handling him very tenderly, but it was strange, and vexed me keenly, to see how he shrank and winced, as if in pain, under Frank's hand.

"It's confoundedly queer how he hates me," Frank muttered, with considerable vexation: "I wonder what I ever did to vex him? He does not shrink from your hand," looking at me as I bathed Charles's temples, "such a little white hand as it is."

"Hush, pray Mr. Langley. Are you better Charlie? cheer up, there is some colour coming back into your cheeks now."

"So there is, thank heaven," said Frank, heartily: "you are coming round now, old fellow."

Charles lifted his head from the sofa with some incoherent expression of being much better, but let it fall again with a faint moan of acute pain.

"Poor fellow," said Frank, and I saw now the expression of pity stung him to whom it was addressed.

"Don't move, Charlie, lie still. I hear Aunt Mary coming."

He took her hand and kissed it as she hurried in and bent over him, with the face of terror and love he knew so well.

I gave up my place to her, and went out on the terrace, feeling weary and sorrowful enough.

Frank followed me out.

"Will you forgive me what happened just now?" he whispered.

In the fright of Charles's illness I had almost forgotten Frank's misdemeanours; and I believe

a wish to get rid of him was uppermost just then.

"Come, let me have one word of pardon ere I depart," said he.

"Be it so then, provided you promise to err no more; and now, Mr. Langley, you had really better go home. Poor Charlie is so ill, and—"

"Well, I am off, if nothing less will satisfy your obdurate heart. I suppose its no use to ask you to walk down the garden with me."

"Not the least. Good-night, Mr. Langley."

And he strode away, and I caught myself, to my great surprise, watching his tall, handsome figure in the clear moonlight till it was lost in the deep tree shadows, and then laughing, half sadly, at my folly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE next day was a gloomy one, dull rain, and grey clouds—Frank not coming over, and Charles ill and languid in his own room, and I listless and weary, and trying laudably hard to think it was only the influence of the aforesaid melancholy weather. Even Maude's prattle could not cheer me, but at evening-tide came light. The grey vapours cleared away, the sun broke out with a magic glory, the wet leaves shone and glistened, the west glowed with liquid gold and fire, and with the brightness came a note from Mrs. Macdonald, wanting me to go and drink tea with her.

Mrs. Macdonald was a dear old Scotch soul, a large hearted motherly body—one of those the world treats very ungratefully, and would do ill without—an adept at haggis hotch-potch, barley scones, and all other world-famed Scottish dainties, with an inexhaustible stock of old-world stories, and cures for every complaint under the sun. Out of pure goodness of heart, she always devoted herself, whenever she came to Holmsley, to Charles's amusement, for which act of self-denial, she got nothing but signal ingratitude, he always manœuvring to escape her, the more so, as she, in all innocence, good soul, was perpetually raising his ire by sending him indescribable messes of her own manufacture, to tempt his appetite, and working him slippers about two sizes too large, which last was a grievous wrong, as Charles was rather fastidious in his toilet, and prided himself a little on his small hands and feet.

Jessie was away on a visit, and Mrs. Macdonald, not being very well, was sitting by the

window with her knitting in her lap, looking a little moped, but on seeing me, she brightened up wonderfully, gave me a motherly hug, and summoned Ailie to get tea, brought forth her fresh scones and delicious honey, and feasted me right royally. Then after tea, she took up her knitting again, and sat telling me, I sitting idly by the window, in the moonlight, stories of herself, when a wild lassie on her father's farm, in bonnie Inverary, and of Bailie Macdonald, the Glasgow trader, a douce cannie man, who came to take her away, and how strange town life had seemed to her after her free heartsome country existence. Also, how that after years of patient toiling and moiling Bailie Macdonald had become unfortunate, and had to give up business, to avoid bankruptcy, and how people changed, and the world frowned and their old friends looked coldly upon them. And how all this had weighed down her husband's strong heart, and shortened his life; and how tender and kind and thoughtful he had been to her during his last illness, and

how peacefully at last he went to sleep. A few noiseless tears dropped upon her knitting here, but she brushed them away, and spoke simply of the gratitude with which she might say with the Shunamite of old, "It is well," to Him who had granted such a quiet evening to her days.

Mrs. Macdonald's talk always impressed me like some old familiar strain, very simply and quietly played. We were both startled when we heard the church clock strike ten, and found how the evening had glided away. Then she would bring out her gooseberry wine and home-made cake to feast me with, and hardly was this discussed, when a sharp ring came at the door, and up came the maid servant to tell me Mr. Langley had come to fetch me home.

I had scarcely time to wonder at the strangeness of this proceeding, for Mrs. Macdonald sent down eager messages to him to walk up stairs, to which the answer returned was, that Mr. Langley was more sorry than he could say to be obliged to decline, but it was getting late, and

he had to walk back to Haverford after taking Miss Marsden home, the English of which was, that Mr. Langley was smoking a cigar in the moonlight and did not want to throw it away.

"Aweel," said Mrs. Macdonald, as she kissed me, "a wilfu' man maun hae his way, and he's wilfu' enough, that same chield, I'm thinking. Weel, good-night, bairnie, and the Lord's blessing on that sonsie face o' thine. I doubt na thee'll hae a pleasant walk hame."

"Well, Mr. Langley," I said, when I had reached the porch, "whence came you, and who sent you for me?"

"Dressed already?" said he in amazement, "you are absolutely an incomparable girl. You rise hourly in my estimation, Miss Helen."

"I ask you a question, and you answer me with ridiculous fine speeches. Who told you to fetch me?"

"Nobody. I walked up to Holmsley, found you out, and volunteered. Are you very angry?"

“A little astounded, perhaps.”

“Peggy might have caught cold. You see I am always thoughtful. Mr. Brotherton was out, luckily, or he would not have trusted me, and I had to make all sorts of pledges to bring you home sober and decorously, to satisfy Aunt Mary. But come, take my arm, and let's luxuriate in this delicious balmy night. Does my cigar annoy you?”

“No: provided you don't puff the smoke into my eyes.”

“I'm rather disappointed that you don't order me to throw it away,” he said; “I wish you'd tell me to do something to prove my devotion, Helen, such as burning every cigar in my possession for instance.”

“You are very foolish, Mr. Langley, and besides, I wish you would not call me Helen,” I replied, scarcely knowing whether to laugh or be offended.

“Well, I won't, but it springs so easily to one's lips; it's such a delicious name. Let us

turn up here, and go home the longest way; you won't refuse me that?"

We went through the churchyard, where the graves slept quietly in the moonlight, that rested on them like a benediction, and the broad still shadow of the old grey church tower, which fell across them, sobering the mellow glory, like the dimness of earth skirting the light of heaven. We walked very slowly, the sweet air met us like a caress, the mellow tender beauty of the night rested on us like a spell.

I don't know—I cannot distinctly recall how he began to open his heart to me in words that trembled on his lips; for some strange shyness, very different from his usual bold impetuosity, seemed to have come over him, and I felt the arm on which I leant shake. When he had ended and paused for my reply, I felt I must have loved him without knowing it, for while he spoke that rush of ecstatic joy that comes but once in a life-time, made my heart quiver, and

my eyes overflow. I don't know how I answered him, but I remember we walked up and down in that green old church-yard path for, perhaps, an hour or more, for neither of us took any note of time.

The jarring echoes of the church clock, as it struck out eleven over the hushed village and silent graves, woke us from a trance, which I would fain have had last for ever.

"How late it is, Mr. Langley; they will be so angry at home."

"What, Mr. Langley still? Say Frank, do, just for once," said he.

"Well, Frank, then, what will Aunt Mary think?"

"Blessing on your sweet lips," he exclaimed, kissing me in his madcap fashion.

"You must learn to mend your manners. I cannot be pulled about in that unceremonious way, and brushed by that rough moustache."

"I will shave it off, I swear, if you like. I will do anything to please you, Helen, my

darling Helen Why, you have made me the happiest rascal in existence."

"What will Aunt Mary and Uncle Edward say?"

How forcibly I felt the strangeness of this new embarrassment!

"Ay, there's the rub! I hope they won't be very hard and exacting. I shall have to undergo a strict examination as to my position and prospects. Heaven help me! My position is easily defined. Frank Langley, Esq., with nothing in his pocket, and vague expectations from an old aunt, founded on her always promising to do something for him; and prospects, not particularly enlivening. Going out to my regiment and, if the war breaks out again, earning promotion in two or three hot fights, losing an arm or a leg perhaps, and getting a pension. Would you have me then, Helen?"

"I don't know really, such a contingency requires consideration."

We had entered our own gates by this time,

when, flashed across me with a sharp sudden sense of pain, the recollection that he thought me Aunt Mary's niece, that I had never revealed to him the stain upon my birth. It must be done and at once. The sudden revulsion of feeling from happiness to breathless fear almost choked me. He stopped, and anxiously asked if I was ill; then with an inward cry for strength, which was mercifully granted to me, I told him everything. He did not pause long—poor, brave, generous-hearted Frank—when my tale was told, only one short moment of breathless surprise, perhaps pity, and then he caught me closely to him, kissed my white cheeks, and lovingly ridiculed my shame and terror, saying I was dearer to him than ever.

“There is Mrs. Brotherton, standing on the terrace, looking out for us,” said he, “run on and whisper it all to her. I will wait here, and you can call me. I am getting a very coward, Helen, darling, full of all sorts of frights and

misgivings. I'm afraid they'll never give you to me. Run on like a lap-wing, and God speed you!"

"Why, Nelly, have you been wandering again? Here is Uncle Edward vowing all sorts of vengeance against Mr. Langley."

I ran into her arms, and with beating heart and faltering tones whispered my secret. Was the start I felt one of joy or sorrow?

"My darling! I am glad you are so happy"—her voice trembled very much—"it is no such great secret to me, little one. I have guessed for a long time. God bless you!"

"You are so wise and good, darling auntie; and Frank—Mr. Langley is so noble—he knows everything. I have told him—"

"You have told him everything, have you, eh? Well, I mean to tell him something on my own account presently," said Uncle Edward, coming out of the drawing-room and shaking his fist good humouredly at me.

"Nay, you must listen first," said Aunt Mary,

with her loving smile. "Helen has a story to tell you."

"A story, eh? a fine story I make no doubt. Come, let me hear it," taking me by the chin. "Why, here's a face all blushes, and tears, and smiles, like an April day! Where's that young rascal, Helen?"

"He is coming, uncle."

Frank's patience had failed, and he was coming towards us to speak for himself.

"Here he comes on the wings of love," said Uncle Edward laughing heartily; "take breath, man. So you've been making a goose of this little blushing, trembling simpleton here? What have you to say for yourself?"

"Not much, Sir," answered Frank. "I am a bad hand at making speeches. I know I don't deserve your sweet niece, but if you will give her to me—"

"You'll be as good a husband to her as she ought to have, is that it? Give me your hand, you're a fine fellow, Langley, but I won't give

her to you in a hurry, Sir. We must talk and think about it. Why, Lord bless her," kissing me heartily, "the little rogue's twisted herself about my old heart so closely, that I shall be loth to part with her."

As he spoke a movement within the open glass door of the drawing-room attracted my attention. I saw a face pass within, in the shadow of the room, a face that looked like Charles's, on which the moonlight fell white and ghastly. It passed so phantomlike that it startled me. My eyes fell on Aunt Mary, she had seen it too, and I caught the whispered words, "Unfortunate boy!"

"Come in, and have some supper," said Uncle Edward, laying hold of Frank, "for a pair of noodles as you are; there's nobody here but Charlie and little Maudie. Ah! here she comes with her round face, to know what the fuss is all about."

But Maude asked no questions, and seemed to understand it all very well, for she only gave me a loving hug, and Frank a roguish glance of her

blue eyes, and laughed merrily at us both. Charles was not there.

“He has just gone out of the room,” said Maude, in answer to Uncle Edward’s enquiries; and then she went to fetch him, but presently returned to say, that we must forgive his coming back, as he had gone to his room, and was too tired to come down again.

As she said this, I observed Aunt Mary passed her hand over her forehead, with something like a movement of distress, and there came over her face, that strange troubled look I had seen once and only once before. Soon after she quietly left the room, and did not come back for some time. Uncle Edward was making us all sit down at the table, and proposing all sorts of toasts that brought the colour to my cheeks and made Frank look foolish, and Maude laugh wickedly; but a sort of shrinking shamefacedness, a half doubt of my own happiness seemed to have come over me, and I was very glad to say good night to everybody, and run away with

Maude to our own quiet room. We had plenty to talk of that night—at least she had, and in her merry chat I forgot everything but the present.

Frank was now domesticated at Holmsley, and a new sort of existence seemed to begin for me, which appeared strange enough at first. It was so odd to see Mr. Tremordyn's amazed looks—which piqued me a little at the same time—and to receive Mary's loving congratulations, and to endure Mrs. Macdonald's hearty delight, and Uncle Edward's sly allusions and jokes, and to take long walks and rides with Frank alone, and unrebuked, to sing the songs he chose, and wear what he liked best, and to be looked upon as his exclusive property.

It was very strange, but very delightful, and we gave ourselves up to the brightness of the present without any shadowy fears of the future; were content to float on down the sunny tide, softly rippled by the summer wind, without thinking what rocks and shoals were ahead.

We were not to be married yet; Frank had nothing save an allowance made him by his aunt, Mrs. Clayton, who had educated him, and bestowed upon him an indefinite promise of leaving him "something handsome," thereby affording ample space for a speculative imagination to disport itself at her death, which Frank was wont to say irreverently might not be for a hundred years.

It was resolved that Frank should join the army as soon as he received his commission, and win his way upward. I liked to feel that our fortunes depended on his brave heart and strong arm. I won courage from his fearless, joyous temper, and leant on him with a feeling of repose and security I had never known before.

Nora had received the news of my engagement strangely enough. At first she treated it as a joke, and laughed at me till I was half offended; then an instantaneous change came over the bright mockery of her lovely face, and looking fixedly at me, she burst into tears, and then seeing me

frightened, laughed again, and ended by kissing me, and laying her proud, golden head on my bosom, and faltering out wishes for my happiness.

“Frank is a fine fellow, and deserves you, Nelly. I think he loves you as well as poor Steenie loves me. Poor, silly boy! Shall I read you his last letter?”

She had scarcely ever mentioned him before, but now she took out the letter, and read between tears and laughter, that sounded sad enough, poor Steenie’s letter, full of high hope, and daring, and honest overflowing boyish affection, and earnest talk of dying a soldier’s death for her, and asking but for one sigh as a tribute to his memory, and of the thought of her giving three-fold strength to his arm, and all such simple out-pourings of the boy’s gallant, earnest heart, blurred and blotted by tears from his handsome eyes.”

“Poor Steenie! Oh, Nora, he is a noble fellow.”

“What, are you crying, Helen, you little

goose?" Nora said, with a faint attempt to laugh. "I felt half inclined to cry myself when I first read it, though I am generally a hard-hearted wretch enough. Poor fellow, I hope he'll come back shining with honour and glory, and that he'll get a better wife than I should be. He couldn't well get a worse;" a look in her eyes belying her lightness of tone.

"I forgot to tell you," she went on, "that I had a letter from Emily this morning, dated London. She has gone up to town for two or three months to consult her pet-doctor on one of the hundred-and-fifty ailments she is troubled with, and she wants me to go to her, as she feels low and nervous; so she says. I have not told Aunt Mary yet. I am thinking of starting the day after to-morrow."

"So soon? How I shall miss you," I said in amaze, at this sudden arrangement.

"Frank will fill my place," she answered with her light laugh; "besides, Emily is very kind, and I have had a long leave of absence."

“Of course: but has not Mrs. Clayton a husband?”

“Oh, yes, there’s Mr. Clayton; he’s a retired banker; dear Ben, she calls him; so you may fancy what he is. Nobody thinks of him—he’s a cypher—a nonentity—the servants hardly answer his bell.”

“Nora!” said I, laughing in spite of myself at her description of this unhappy Mr. Clayton.

“Emily has a nice snug little house in Hyde Park, and I’ll make her ask you and Frank there before he leaves England. I’ll introduce you to some of my despairing swains, which are too numerous to mention, as the newspaper reporters say. But there’s Frank calling you; don’t you hear his honest stentorian shout? Run away, Nell. What a bright, little, happy, good face it is!” and she kissed me with something like envy in her eyes.

She had been so strange in her manner lately, so changeable in her moods, so petulant and fretful at times in her way of speaking, so different

in short to her old, heedless, brilliant self; that some vague unaccountable fear came over me, whenever I thought of her. She very often received letters directed in the same hand-writing, which she seemed very fearful of anybody seeing, and Frank had several times in his heedless fashion, jested with her about some Mr. Wilson; when she always grew very angry. But Frank, though I fancied he might have relieved my doubts, refused to explain anything, and professed utter ignorance, and so Nora went away under care of Uucle Edward, who was going to London for a day or two, on business, and I fancied her farewells were cold and constrained.

I went back into the house, musing over the shadow that had fallen between us, and what the cause could be, but I had no time for thought that day. Frank's horse's hoofs were heard in the avenue, and presently he rushed in with an invitation for me, to a party at Mrs. Selwyn's. Maude had been staying for the last few days at Mrs. Mac Allaster's, in the town, and was to go

from thence; and as Aunt Mary was unwell and not inclined for the festivity, it was settled after some consultation, and a good deal of shamefacedness on my part, for which I got unmercifully laughed at by Frank, that I was to go alone with him. And I went, taking—oh! dim shadow of the remorseless past—a girlish pride in my handsome Frank, and pleasantly fluttered by the thought that every one in the room was envying my heart-happiness, and thinking that never before had been such a bright evening, lit with the love-magic. And then we came home, Frank telling me, with a great many kisses, that he must tear himself away from me for a few days—a week at farthest—for his aunt, Mrs. Clayton, was growing wroth at his unconscionably long absence, and she was too kind an old soul to affront—too important, moreover—and he wanted to tell her “all about me” (my cheeks grew red at the very thought), and likewise to plague that awful abstraction “the Horse Guards” about his commission.

Accordingly he set off next morning—galloped over to Haverford to catch the early coach before anybody was up except myself, like a simpleton as I was, and I believe the whole house missed his bright handsome face and cheery laughter woefully. Maude was still at Haverford, so I had not her to cheer me. Mary Tremordyn had gone to the sea-side with little Ned, who had been ailing, leaving her husband to endure his loneliness with stoical composure. Uncle Edward was up to the ears in magistrate's meetings and farming affairs, Aunt Mary and Peggy in a chaos of preparations for the harvest home festivities, for which the time was drawing near; and I was weary and listless, and wondering vaguely why the whole sunshine of earth seemed to have passed away with Frank. His absence of a week stretched itself into ten days, and when at last sitting drearily in the drawing-room, his bold, familiar stride fell on my ear, it was such rejoicing music that I was too foolish to do anything but run into his arms, and for-

getting all his misdeeds, cry out my full heart on his breast. It was not till the first nonsense was over, that I remembered he had been gone four days beyond his time.

“I was afraid to come back,” said he, drawing my arm through his, and scrubbing my hand mercilessly with his rough moustache, in uncouth attempts to kiss it.

“Afraid!”

“Literally afraid, by Jove, of your dark reproachful eyes, Nelly—I couldn’t meet them in broad daylight. Besides, Aunt Emily has taken up almost every spare minute of my time. I was almost sick of dancing after the dear old body like a tame cat. Heaven forgive me! and then, I wanted, you know, to worry the Horse Guards about my commission, which I’ve got—wish me joy, Nell darling. But I have been grievously anxious about you, conjecturing what you might be doing in my absence.”

“You began to be apprehensive lest I should drown myself for love of you, I suppose.”

“Don’t be too sharp on me, sweet Nell. You must forgive me now I am going to leave you so soon. The very thought of it makes my heart tremble like a girl’s. Look here,” and he drew from his pocket a great portentous war-office letter, with a gigantic red seal, “here’s my commission. I am appointed to the —th regiment, now in the Mediterranean, and am to join in a month. Short notice, but so much the better. Don’t look pale, little woman.”

“I am glad you are going there. Steenie’s regiment is in the Mediterranean, and you may meet. I am sure you will like him, Frank.”

“I’ll fraternise with him for your sake. Nell, we shall become sworn brothers I doubt not.”

He drew me to the seat on the terrace. It was very weak to lean my head on his arm, and give way to a burst of tears, but I could not help it.

“Don’t make a child of me, Nell,” he said, in a voice that choked a little.

I struggled with myself, and soon grew calm enough to listen cheerily to his high hopes and glowing visions, to draw courage from his brave clear voice. I don't know how long we sat there, forgetting all the world besides.

"There is a month yet, Nelly. Is there no hope of their letting you marry me before I go."

"None, Frank. It would be very wrong and foolish. Surely you can trust me?"

"Ay; but I should so like to feel you were my own exclusive property, you little white fragile creature, to have you bound to me by irrevocable ties, that I had a right to knock every man down who looked at you."

"That would be a perilous privilege, Frank."

"Couldn't we run away into Scotland and get united. Mrs. Frank Langley would sound very well, Nelly."

"The title must be fairly earned, Frank. We must have none of those dishonourable stage tricks."

“Then if I were killed you’d get a pension. Won’t even that tempt you?”

“Not a whit,” said I laughing, “but come, you forget you have travelled all night. Are you not tired and hungry?”

“No; I had some breakfast at Haverford, before I came on here; and there goes Uncle Edward across the lawn, I must tell him the news,” and off he darted.

And I ran up stairs to seek Aunt Mary, and tell her my story of Frank’s commission having arrived, and of the coming separation, and to pour out all the hopes and fears of my full heart on her loving breast.

CHAPTER V.

THE next morning's post brought me a wonderfully kind and gracious letter from Frank's aunt, Mrs. Clayton, inviting me to go and stay with her during the time that Frank would be in London procuring his outfit, and that I might come up under his care. She was so anxious to see her dear nephew's choice, she had heard so much of me from him and from her darling Nora. This, Frank told me, was the result of his visit to London.

"I went to see the old lady, and praised you up to the skies, Nell darling," said he in his laughing way, "and she was so charmed with

the prospect of getting rid of me for good that she made me a present of twenty pounds, and, moreover, embraced me, said she would pay for my outfit, and avowed great anxiety to see 'my choice,' which does my taste infinite credit, eh, Nelly."

"Nonsense, Frank."

"It does, though, and so Aunt Emily shall acknowledge. You must be very dutiful and submissive, for though she is the best old soul living, as I've reason to say, for I owe everything to her, she has her crotchets, and one of them, a harmless one enough, is that her own importance is overwhelming. You must bear that in mind, never express a contrary opinion, but invariably yield every point to her, and you'll get on swimmingly."

"I doubt not I shall find agreeing with her easy enough, but how do you manage, whose disposition is not of such soft material."

"Why, I do find it rather hard sometimes, being as you know rather a stubborn dog, and

we have had two or three tough quarrels. But they don't last very long, for she is the most milky-hearted of old ladies. Nora used generally to be the peace-maker."

"Is she very fond of Nora?"

"Fond! she dotes upon her, loads her with presents, and gratifies her every whim. Nora reigns supreme over the household, and is the belle by many degrees of the old lady's set, with lovers by the score. There's a Mr. Wilson, they both think a great deal of, a dark, fiery looking fellow, a most accomplished and highly-finished gentleman outside, but a gambling heartless rascal. He has taken them both in, I'm afraid. He's the natural son of Lord Malverston, and a great spendthrift."

A crowd of nameless fears and anxieties woke up within me.

"Nora doesn't like him, I hope?"

"I can hardly tell. I suppose she's dazzled by the fellow. But come, away with that frightened look, Nell, my treasure. We must

have nothing but sunshine now, for the last month we are together."

"And then—hope! We will say good bye bravely, Frank, and allow of no desponding fears, or weaknesses, or misgivings. And I will write you such wise letters to read on your watches."

"God bless you, little Nelly—white, pure, slender, delicate creature, whom I could crush with a blow. What a priceless jewel you are to me, with your sweet head nestling on my arm, like a loving bird. God keep and shield her, true, tender, forgiving woman!"

His brave, strong, tender heart spoke in his faltering voice, shone through his clear true blue eyes, as he took up a lock of my hair and kissed it.

"We have no more time for nonsense now," I said, disengaging myself laughingly. "I have a hundred preparations to make for my first visit to London."

My preparations sped bravely, for dear Maude

came home from Haverford on purpose to help me, in a flutter of delight at my going to London, and determined that I should take enough finery to impress upon Mrs. Clayton the fact that country folks really did know something of life.

We arrived late in London, after a long, tiresome journey, my companions inside being a sick lady, in a high state of peevishness and fretful irritability, who insisted on keeping all the windows down, and whose shawls, baskets, and pillows, and lap-dog, took up three times as much room as she was entitled to, and who entertained all the other occupants with long and minute descriptions of her peculiar bodily trials, and the treatment she had undergone at the hands of various doctors, to the great wrath of a jolly-looking, ruddy-faced country gentleman, who was seated opposite her, and who scrupled not, whenever the invalid subsided into a doze, which unfortunately never lasted five minutes, to give us his opinion of her in no very measured terms,

and in a very gruff and terribly distinct whisper. I needed Frank's merry handsome face, thrust in at the window at the end of every stage, to console and encourage me. But London was reached at last. I had never seen it before, and as we drove in the hackney coach from the inn-yard where the coach stopped, to Mrs. Clayton's house at Kensington, the brilliantly lighted streets, the never-ceasing crowds, pressing onwards like an irresistible human wave, the gleaming shops, with their plate-glass windows, glistening as it seemed with all the heaped up luxuries of earth, filled me with a wonder and bewilderment, such as a fairy scene in a pantomime would a dazzled child.

Mrs. Clayton's windows were blazing with festive lights, and being admitted by a stately functionary in plush and powder, who seemed to have passed his entire life in the admiring inspection of his own calves, we found to my great dismay that Mrs. Clayton had a dinner party, and consequently was not to be seen just then.

Frank, however, was at home, and after remorselessly sending out the gentleman in powder, to pay the driver, and soil his fingers by helping to bring in the luggage, hurried me into a comfortable little library, with its walls lined with handsomely bound books, which seemed kept for show, and never to be profaned by removing fingers, its Turkey carpet, and black marble chimney-piece, and covered-up globes, evidently kept for the same purpose as the books, and luxurious lounging chairs, in whose cushioned depths it was a hard matter to keep awake, and after attaining this haven of refuge, ordered dinner immediately. And then, pulling off my shawl and bonnet, he rallied me on looking so pale, and shy, and frightened, and vowed that everybody in the house would overwhelm me with welcomes and kindness, and that Aunt Emily should be a mother to me.

I believe I felt rather lonely and uneasy, like a shy child who had never been from home before, and was silly enough to let fall a few tears, which he kissed away, and so overpowered me with his

mirthful nonsense that I could not help ere long laughing back at him.

Then dinner came, and before it was half done Nora entered, radiant in pink silk and glistening with ornaments, looking so brightly and dazzlingly beautiful that she seemed to fill the little room with lustre, and light up its sombre furniture, like some brilliant jewel.

She received me most lovingly, and seemed to have quite forgotten her old quarrel with Frank, heartily returning his unceremonious brotherly greeting, and gaily replying to his compliments on her dazzling appearance.

I saw not now the shadow on her beauty I had grieved over at Holmsley. She was Nora again, bright, heedless, and fascinating. She said the ladies had just gone up to the drawing-room, and repeated many kind messages from Mrs. Clayton, who was very anxious to see me; and then, seeing me shrink dismayed from appearing in my travelling guise before so many strangers, kissed me, and said I should do as I pleased, and should not

be tormented. I should go to her room if I liked, where a bed had been prepared for me (she knew I would rather share her room than sleep quite alone), as soon as I had dined and taken off my wrappings, and lie down, or talk to her, or do what pleased me best, and be teased with no introductions to-night.

I gladly agreed to her plan, and my dinner being soon over, we left Frank, in spite of his indignant remonstrances against my running away so early, either to drink his wine by himself, or to join the gentlemen in the dining-room, as he thought fit.

Perhaps, in my innocence, I wondered a little at Mrs. Clayton's not coming down stairs to see me, and thought she was treating her nephew's future wife a little unceremoniously, for the stinging remembrance of my birth made me more keenly alive to anything that seemed like neglect. I am afraid I half wished myself at home, as Nora led me into her luxurious little bed-chamber, where a bright fire had been lit, as it was a damp, dull October evening, placed me on the sofa on

one side of the fire, and took herself the arm-chair on the other.

“I daresay you think it queer, Nelly, that Emily did not come down to see you; but you mustn’t mind. Emily’s the best creature on earth, but she has strange notions, such wonderful ideas of her own dignity, that I don’t imagine she would come down stairs to see the Duke of Wellington himself. What are you looking at me so for, little one?”

It seemed quite natural in the superiority of her beauty and fascination that she should call me thus. I believe I was wondering at her loveliness at the time she spoke, and told her so. She laughed in her graceful careless way, and then began unclasping her bracelets, and preparing to remove her brilliant dress, saying she was tired of the company in the drawing-room, and should not go down again.

And thus we sat till late over the fire, she telling me tales of her London life, and I wondering at the details of an existence so new and strange to me.

CHAPTER VI.

NEXT morning Nora superintended my dressing, with an eagerness that half puzzled and half amused me, insisting that her own maid, a voluble Frenchwoman, with a very small waist, should dress my hair, and finally telling me with an approving kiss, that I looked a very sweet little rustic primrose, led me down to the breakfast room, a pretty apartment, looking out on a trim and somewhat smoky London flower garden, and where breakfast was laid out with what seemed appalling elegance to my country eyes.

I felt rather shy of Mrs. Clayton, from the way

Nora had spoken of her, and was a little appalled when I heard (we were the first in the room) the rustling of her silken skirts approaching, though after her entrance, and her really kind and cordial welcome, I felt pleasantly surprised.

She was a little, rotund woman, cheerful and alert, with clear, lively black eyes, and good teeth, and a pretty colour as I thought, though Nora, when I spoke of it to her, laughed at my simplicity at not perceiving she rouged, which gave me something like a shock. Her patronage was so straightforward and kindly that you could not take it ill, and if you felt that her ideas of her own importance were overwhelming, it conveyed no unpleasant sensations, but accorded well enough with the rustling of her spreading silken robes, the stately movements of her little person, and her clear, decided, but good-humoured speech. I could not help a jarring sensation of being out of place, as the other guests came in, but Mrs. Clayton's kind unceremonious manner, and Frank's welcome appearance, soon set me more at

ease, though at first I felt some terror that he was going to kiss me before everybody.

There were three or four other guests, but I only remember one, a Miss Esham, a tall, fashionable-looking girl, with very sharp, brilliant, black eyes, but who nevertheless professed to be short-sighted, and used a gold eye-glass, through which I caught her two or three times furtively eyeing me at breakfast, to my great confusion. She was a fluent talker, and seemed to be very intimate with Nora.

Mr. Clayton was an elderly gentleman, with grey hair, and a resigned expression of face, faultlessly neat in his dress (a chocolate coat, knee breeches and shoe buckles), who sat at the bottom of the table and carved the ham, an office which he executed with a laborious politeness that was really distressing, considering the small account in which the poor man seemed to be held by his wife and her guests.

The business of his life seemed to be to sit at the bottom of the table, and carve and make him-

self generally useful, and to return meek replies to his wife's gracious notices, always prefaced with "dearest Ben."

After breakfast Nora carried off Miss Esham and me into what she called her boudoir, a pretty little room near the drawing-room, where her harp stood, and where was scattered about her embroidery, her drawing, her books, and nicknacks. Her merry, affectionate good-nature soon drove away all strangeness of feeling, and Miss Esham being also very gracious and friendly, teasing me about Frank, and laughing at me for blushing, I felt quite at home before the morning was over.

Then came luncheon, and after that numerous visitors, chiefly gentlemen, and among them the Mr. Wilson Frank had told me of, a very dark, foreign-looking man, with an olive complexion, and black moustache, who, courteous and gentleman-like as he was, impressed me somehow disagreeably.

Nora appeared to like him very much, I thought. She received his attentions, which he

addressed almost exclusively to her, in a pleased, fluttered way, very unusual with her. About half-past three, she and Miss Esham set out on their ride in the park, with three or four attendant cavaliers. They wanted me to come with them, but Frank laid hands on me, declaring that I was coming out with him, that he meant to show me London, and enjoy my wonder and admiration by himself.

Nora and Miss Esham remonstrated vehemently, and Mrs. Clayton was appealed to, who declared, with her complacent smile, that her interference would be quite useless, and that Frank was as immovable as the Monument, when he resolved upon anything, looking at him as though she rather liked him for it; so the end of it was that the riders went their way and Frank and I went ours, to my great delight.

The whirl and bustle of London streets, and the glitter of the shops, amused while they bewildered me, and Frank enjoyed my amazement with an honest heartiness that diverted me the more.

We took a hackney coach from Kensington to the bottom of Regent Street, and there got out and walked, the novelty and variety of everything almost taking my breath away. We walked up Regent Street and Oxford Street, I in a continued state of breathlessness, and holding Frank's arm very close. I saw the British Museum and the Clubs, and more than I can remember, he varying the proceedings by taking me into a magnificent jeweller's shop (a very Aladdin's cave it seemed to me), and buying for me, in spite of my remonstrances, the very handsomest brooch and necklace he could hit upon, and paying the obsequious shopman on the spot, though the price sounded alarming in my ears.

By this time it was so late that we were obliged to call another coach, to my sorrow, and drive straight home to be in time for dinner. As soon as I was dressed for dinner, under the joint superintendence of Nora and her maid, Mrs. Clayton sent for me into her dressing-room, where, after many gracious speeches, she

presented me with some very beautiful pearl ornaments, which had belonged to Frank's mother, and which, she said, must of right go to his wife. I know I resisted the gift very strenuously, much to her surprise, my cheeks burning all the time with a hot, painful flush of shame. I knew the secret of my birth was unknown to her, and more than once I half resolved to tell her, but I was weak and cowardly, and the words died away upon my lips. I felt like an unworthy pretender to her kindness, an actor of a false and treacherous part; but when I hinted this timidly to Frank afterwards, he treated the idea with such ridicule that I had not courage to recur to it again.

Mrs. Clayton seemed so confounded by my refusal to take the pearls, that I dared not persist in it, but entreated her at least to keep them for me, till I married; that they were too handsome for me to wear now, and would be much safer in her keeping. In this she graciously concurred, and kissing me, told me that

I really was a very sweet, sensible, proper thinking little creature.

Mr. Wilson dined with us, and afterwards we all went to Drury Lane—a new and intoxicating scene of enchantment for me. The recollection of that bright novelty and pleased amazement, only to be felt once, brings even now at this distance of years a smile to my faded cheek.

Frank sat close behind me during the whole of the play, his arm round the back of my chair, engrossing between the acts when we had time to talk—every word and look of mine to Miss Esham's great amusement, and I was foolish enough rather to like his selfishness. He was unmercifully rallied about this when we returned home to supper, especially by Mr. Wilson, who had been Nora's devoted slave the whole evening, but Frank twirled his moustache, and looked perilously grave, and Mrs. Clayton averred with a smile and a nod, that lovers were proverbially the most selfish people in the world; and then proceeded to wake up her husband, whom we

found on our entrance comfortably asleep by the fire, with his pocket-handkerchief over his head, and enjoying, I hope, poor man, Elysian dreams.

The next day Frank, Nora, and I went to see Esther, who had just returned from her wedding trip. Dear Nest was the very happiest and handsomest of young brides, full of bright child-like pride, inexpressibly pretty in the handsome appointments of her spacious mansion, in her carriage and horses, and, above all, in her husband, whom we did not see, he being in the city, but who she averred, with her pretty sparkling laugh, was the best and dearest of creatures.

“We must come soon and spend the day with her; Tom would be so vexed at missing us,” though all my efforts to bring Tom before my mind’s eye in a vexed condition, were unavailing. And old Mr. and Mrs. Warrington lived in their own house in Montague Place, Esther said, which certainly was a highly desirable arrangement, and they really were very kind, nice old people, and dear Nest was very happy, I thought, as we went

away, after spending the whole afternoon with her, through the red October sunset; a bright, unclouded morning, was hers just then—long might it last—and I was happy, too, leaning on Frank's arm, living in the present, haunted by no dread of the misty future, with no wish to pierce the shadows on the horizon.

How fast those shady autumn days fled away—visions of the night as they are now. The whirl and bustle of this London-life amused at first, then puzzled and wearied me; and I clung closer to him for the little while that he was mine: and I am glad to think now that his wrongs, his errors, and misfortunes, are a perished dream, that we parted in love and friendship: that his last glance was one of truth and affection. I am afraid I grew selfish as his last day drew near—the past and future were forgotten, I lived only in the present; other people's words and actions ceased to trouble or please me. Frank and I were the only two in the world.

The day came: it is stamped so painfully on

my memory that I can recall its minutest incident. He was to leave London by the night coach for Portsmouth; he had said farewell to all, torn himself from his aunt's tears and embraces, and coming out met me on the stairs, caught my hand, and drew me into the little library, where he had taken me on the first night, and there held me to his strangely beating heart.

"Don't make me a child, Nelly," he said in hoarse, quivering tones.

"No, Frank; we will part bravely and hopefully. I will pray for you; do you pray for yourself, for us both."

"God keep you, my soul's darling! You will be true to me, Nell; swear it once again?"

I had no voice to speak it, but my face answered him. He gave me another close strain, another half choked blessing, and was gone, and his place empty.

CHAPTER VII.

FRANK had not been long gone when a strong wish to go home took possession of me, for I thought that there, among the dear familiar faces, and in my pleasant quiet duties, I could better stifle the vain regrets and longings, that strive as I might against them, would force their way in. Mrs. Clayton was very kind, and petted me indefatigably to keep up my spirits, and Miss Esham was wonderfully good-natured in trying to amuse and interest me, albeit she professed much indignation at the folly of moping about a mortal man after his back was turned. She was a tall, dark, handsome girl,

this Miss Esham, of about six-and-twenty perhaps, with large black eyes and fine teeth, a voice and manner of fashionable confidence, and that air of careless conscious superiority that impresses you, you hardly knew why. I was often puzzled at the liking she seemed to have taken for me, a shy, country girl, who had so little in common with her; but I found no solution of the problem, and could therefore only wonder and be grateful for her real kindness. So there was clearly no going home yet for me, especially as Esther insisted so lovingly on my paying her a visit, that it would have been unkind and ungrateful to refuse. The day was fixed for my going to Russell Square, when one dull morning, as I stood listlessly at the window gazing out on the empty park and fading trees, and thinking wistfully of home, I saw a hackney coach stop at the gate, and Aunt Mary's kind handsome face look out.

It was scarcely an instant's work to fly down stairs and into her arms, almost doubting, even

when held in her loving embrace, whether it was her real living presence, or some bright dream; but Aunt Mary it was, and the shadow on her brow, and the sorrow in her eyes was real enough. It seemed as if some indescribable shyness held me back from asking what that sorrow was.

“Nothing is the matter at home, dear Auntie?” I asked, half fearfully. “Charles is not worse?”

“Charles is the object of my unexpected flight, Nelly,” she said, with a smile; “I have brought him up to consult Dr. Twynford, whom we used to know in former days, and who has since become famous. We are all very uneasy about him; there is something—” She stopped, and her eyes fell before mine, with that old, strange, troubled look I had wondered at so often. “We did not tell you of our coming; it was only a sudden determination, and we wanted to take you by surprise; Esther was in the secret, but she kept it faithfully it seems.”

“Indeed she did; it is such a bright and de-

licious surprise to see you. And Charlie in London, too!"

"I have taken a lodging near Oxford Street; we shall be more independent than if we were with Esther; Charles had rather a dread of being quartered on Mr. Warrington—rather unjustly, perhaps, for he has been very kind; but we must bear with his invalid fancies, since he is so patient, poor fellow; he is very anxious to see you." She drew me a little closer, and put back the hair from my forehead. "You look very pale, Nelly; Holmsley air agrees best with you, but there is another cause, as I well know. I can read 'Frank is gone' in your sorrowful eyes, but you must be patient and hopeful, my darling."

Her dear familiar voice and motherly tenderness affected me so strangely that I could not help sobbing a little, and had scarcely time to grow calm again when Mrs. Clayton hurried in, full of gracious apologies for her delay, and followed by Miss Esham, who, having been intro-

duced to Aunt Mary, presently drew me aside, with a whispered inquiry if this was cousin Charles's mother, and then kept up such a stream of nonsense in an under tone, that between replying and dreading lest Aunt Mary should overhear, I had a somewhat uncomfortable time of it, till she rose to depart, resisting all Mrs. Clayton's hospitable entreaties, by pleading the invalid who was waiting for her.

She asked for Nora, but Nora had gone for an early ride with Mr. Wilson. I disliked this man excessively, and Nora's growing intimacy with him haunted me like a nightmare. They were daily, almost hourly together, and I fancied that now she shrank from being alone with me; she had even made some excuse for removing to another room, so that our evening chats over the fire were at an end. I could not drive away the idea that Mr. Wilson had, I knew not wherefore, prejudiced her against me, and though his smooth courteous manner gave me no reason to suppose so, the notion clung obstinately

to me, and would not be shaken off. He was not at all handsome, but there was an indefinable and most perilous charm in his low, musical voice, in the refined, subdued courtesy of his manner, and the dream of passion into which Nora had fallen was one that fetters every pulse of the being, and holds the soul captive.

It was a pleasant relief from these dreary thoughts to find myself rattling through the busy streets, by Aunt Mary's side, my hand resting in hers, hardly able yet to realize that it was her true living self.

She talked much of Charles on the way, the subject that filled her mother's heart, and made her voice falter, and called the trembling tears to her dark eyes.

"I think you have some magic influence over him, Helen," she said, with a mournful smile; "he has been so much worse since you left home—so languid and desponding. He always says there is such comfort in your voice and touch. One day, soon after you were gone, in getting

into the carriage, he struck his knee against the iron step, and ever since it has been so terribly painful that he can scarcely walk at all. We were afraid of some serious injury, but Dr. Twynford says he will recover it."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Yes; we had our first audience this morning before I came to you. He orders Charles not to move from the sofa, so his visit to London will be a dreary one enough, poor boy."

I think we hardly spoke again till we reached our destination.

The lodgings were over a cabinet-maker's shop, in a street leading out of Oxford Street, a little removed from the roar of the great thoroughfare, and the landlady, Aunt Mary told me with a smile, had won her heart, by providing an easier sofa for Charles than the shiny, black, horse-hair delusion common to London lodgings.

She was a good-hearted woman, this landlady (Mrs. Nobbs by name), with only one failing that I could perceive, that of perpetually dissolving

into tears on all occasions. She informed me in confidence on the stairs, that the reason she took so to the young gentleman was that he was the living image of a poor dear boy she once had, who went off in a galloping consumption, and was buried in Hackney churchyard, and whose portrait, cut in black sticking-plaster, in a brown frame, adorned the walls of her parlour behind the shop.

Charles was lying on the sofa thus extracted from Mrs. Nobbs' benevolence, when we went in, and it was very pleasant to see how his pale, care-worn face lit up at the sight of us.

I was so glad to see him that my hearty, sisterly welcome had no restraint in it.

"I have stolen a march on you, Helen, as you see," he said, smiling. "My mother has mercifully dragged me up to London to be tortured, but she will find there is no medicine like the sight of you. You have put new life into me already." A bright flush had started to his wan

cheek, and his eyes shone. "Sit down, Nell, beside me, as you used to do, and tell me all your doings since you left home, and how many conquests you have made, and all the rest of your adventures."

I sat talking to him for some time, telling him anything I thought likely to interest or amuse him, instinctively avoiding as much as I could all mention of Frank.

The spiritless languor of illness would not suffer him to talk much, but he seemed to find a sort of comfort in having me near him—perhaps because mine was a familiar home-face, and in listening to my chatter—and so I stayed the whole day there, and went home at nine o'clock in a hackney coach, fetched by Mrs. Nobbs' youngest son, a most lugubrious youth of eight, with his hair combed straight into his eyes, who looked as if he usually passed his play-hours in a church-yard, contemplating the gravestones, and who received with solemn gratitude the sixpence with which I rewarded him.

Nora and Mr. Wilson were in the drawing-room, singing a duet, when I reached Mrs. Clayton's—her clear ringing notes, that struck the ear like a peal of golden bells, and his deep, rich, musical tones, blending together with an effect wonderfully beautiful. As I came in they both stopped singing (not before I had seen that his arm was round her white neck) and Nora's eyes fell before mine. There was something so marked in the action, and in the scowl he gave me, that I withdrew, feeling half frightened, and was hurrying up stairs to my room, when I met Miss Esham, who dragged me off to Mrs. Clayton's dressing-room—where that good lady was dressing for a whist party, and making herself look so wonderfully young as to be a marvel to behold—to give an account of my long absence and to hear the anxiety she had suffered about me.

Miss Esham opened on me a fire of nonsense about Charles, but I was too full of dreary anxious thought of Nora either to laugh or grow

vexed at it; so ere long she mercifully left me in peace.

Nora came to bed very late. I heard her pass my door singing some strain of the duet I had interrupted, and longed to call out to her but dared not. It was strange, that with the echo of her song in my ears, I should fall asleep and dream of her dead in disgrace and misery.

By the next evening I was established at Esther's, who made such an absolute pet of me, that I began to fear I should be spoilt outright, even her stately husband, of whom I had always entertained great awe, was so profoundly kind and gracious, that I began to form quite a new idea of him. I should have been quite happy that night, seated by Nest's side, near a bright fire in her handsome spacious drawing-room, listening to her merry affectionate prattle, and admiring her pretty girlish airs of patronage and protection, with Mr. Warrington seated opposite in his arm-chair, in irreproachable

evening costume (he always regularly dressed for dinner, even when quite alone, as became a British merchant of dignified character and high reputation), reading the news, and every now and then graciously unbending to smile on us. I should have been happy enough had it not been for the fears and misgivings that oppressed me with regard to Nora. She had wished me good bye coldly enough when I left Mrs. Clayton's in the morning, so coldly that I asked the reason she had changed so towards me, and was ridiculed for my absurd fancies, and told that I had grown insupportably foolish and whimsical since Frank left. She supposed he had carried all my senses away with him. She had never made any enquiries after Aunt Mary or Charles, or said she wished to see them, and her neglect pained me more than her unkind raillery. And thus hurt, grieved, and disappointed, I left you, Nora, my proud, beautiful, lost sister! with no foreshadowings on me—thanks be to God—of how we were to meet again!

Esther had met Miss Esham two or three times, and had taken rather a liking to her.

She was such a shrewd, clever creature, Esther said, and I agreed with her, with such a fund of good nature and kindness of heart under her fashionable manners and assumed worldliness, like one, capable of higher and better things, destined once to nobler pursuits and truer affections, but warped and perverted by the falsehood and glitter of a world, in the glare and turmoil of which her brightest and freshest hours of youth, her heart's first warmth and glow had been wasted and dried up, and worn away.

We talked much of her that evening; Esther was wonderfully anxious for her to see Charles, and schemed how to manage it."

"It must be done some way," said Esther seriously, "or she will think we are ashamed of Charlie, and that will never do; for my part, I am proud of him; he is such a beautiful interesting creature. If he had only good health,

poor fellow, anybody might fall in love with him; don't you think they might, Nelly?"

"Certainly—at least, I suppose so," I said colouring, without knowing why.

"Suppose Lucy Esham was to fall in love with him, eh, Nell? Wouldn't it be delightful?" and Esther laughed with all her heart, calling on Tom for an appreciation of the joke. "Well, we must really get Charlie here somehow or other; you must go with me to-morrow morning, Helen, and we will use all our most persuasive eloquence to get him to come and spend the day here, and I'll write to Lucy Esham to come too, and catch him."

"But you forget the doctor has ordered him not to move from the sofa, and he is so lame since he hurt his knee the other day."

"Nonsense! he can come in a hackney coach and there is a sofa here for him. It's ridiculous to suppose that he is to stay the whole time he's in London shut up in that dismal smothering lodging; why, the poor boy would die of dull-

ness and low spirits. I mean to get him here altogether as soon as he's a little stronger, and cheer him up, and pet him to my heart's content. It would be so delightful to have him in my own house—don't laugh at me, Nelly, and don't look cross, Tom; we never got on very well at home—all my fault no doubt: he used to be irritable from suffering, and I was self-willed, and used to tease him, I'm afraid: so I want to show him how I'm improved, since I've become a discreet matron," and she laughed and blushed again with the tears glittering in her dark brilliant eyes, looking so lovely in her pretty affectionate eagerness, that I wondered at Mr. Warrington's stoicism to sit there reading the newspaper with that bright, bewitching, tender image right before him.

Esther's plan succeeded admirably. We drove the next day to Aunt Mary's lodgings, and spent the day with her, Esther employing all her eloquence to induce Charles to come to Russell Square to-morrow, and to overcome her

mother's scruples. He consented at last, provided he should feel well enough for the exertion, glad perhaps at the prospect of a change of scene, and really moved by her affection, which appeared to surprise and touch him.

So he came the next morning, before lunch, with Aunt Mary, who after confiding him to our care, with particular injunctions as to not letting him talk too much or move from the sofa, went to pay a visit to an old friend in Bedford Square, whom she had not seen for years.

Charles was very lame, and walked with evident difficulty, leaning on his stick, and the pain and exertion of mounting the long staircase, made him look so faint and weary that I think Esther half repented her manœuvres, and would have been very glad to have forgotten Miss Esham's coming altogether. She led him to the easiest arm-chair in the room, placing for him her softest cushions with that sweet, caressing tenderness that sat so prettily on her.

"It was rather foolish and thoughtless of me

to make you come," she said penitently; "you seem so tired, poor dear fellow."

"It is nothing except the exertion of walking," he answered. "Give me a glass of water and I shall be better presently."

I rang for the water, and as he took it from my hand, his melancholy eyes fell on me with that old look of troubled reproach, so sorrowful and so hard to be understood.

"Has our grand doctor done you no good, Charlie?" Esther asked tenderly, leaning over his chair.

"He puts me to indescribable torture, and preaches grave sermons on the necessity of keeping up my spirits, but as for curing me, that is past his skill, I fancy."

Esther looked distressed. "I wish you would be more hopeful," she said sorrowfully.

"The old cry, Nest—Tremordyn's old sermon," he answered with his mournful smile, and leaning back wearily in his chair, he rested his head on his wasted hand, and gazed into the fire.

A sharp ring at the bell startled us all, and called the quick flush to Charles's pale cheek.

"Who on earth—" he began.

The apparition of Lucy Esham, elegantly dressed, and looking very handsome, cut him short with a blank look of dismay, that evidently amused her. She had come to lunch with us according to Esther's invitation.

Charles, with the shyness engendered by ill health, had a nervous dread of strangers, above all of fashionable young ladies, but Lucy possessed the enviable art, when she chose, of setting people at their ease, and it pleased her to-day to be very flatteringly kind to her new acquaintance.

Perhaps her woman's heart was touched by his worn suffering youth, and the beauty of his eyes and voice, for she gave him a sharp glance of approval as he rose with some difficulty and bowed languidly, and then sitting down swept us all along in the easy stream of her clever talk. It was a most melancholy November afternoon, a thick damp mist soaking the leaf-

less trees, and heaps of sodden leaves in the Square, and the greasy pavement, and the struggling umbrellas, and the cross, splashed, miry foot passengers, but Lucy was pleasantly successful in making us all, gathered round the bright fire, forget the fog and wind, and slush and darkness of the world without.

Then, as it grew towards evening, she played and sang to us, which she did, as everything else, brilliantly and skilfully, so that her spirited music, ringing through the shadowy room, lit only by the glowing firelight, was as successful as her pleasant, clever talk had been. She had a large stock of gay inspiriting ballads and martial songs, which she sung with such spirit and dashing vivacity, that we sat entranced. I fancy Charles was dazzled by her cleverness and brilliancy. He listened so intently—his pale, wan features flushing and lighting up at her ringing strains, and when she ended at last, he let his head fall on the sofa, with a long sigh, like one awakening from some bright dream to a

painful reality. She went on playing so long, at our united entreaties, that Aunt Mary returned from her friend's and Mr. Warrington from the city, and found us all listening with absorbed attention; then she sprang up laughing, and saying that Mr. Brotherton's head must be ready to split from the prolonged noise she had inflicted on him, turning, as I fancied, from Mr. Warrington's stately compliments—conferred with that air of dignified condescension he would have employed in speaking to a duchess—to catch Charles's low and earnest thanks. After dinner Aunt Mary urged the necessity of Charles and her going home; but the evening was so wretched, and Esther coaxed and petitioned so prettily that they would stay all night, urging that her brother would be sure to catch cold going through the fog, that Aunt Mary yielded, Charles agreeing to anything that would spare him an exertion for which he felt painfully unfit.

“Sing me one song, Helen,” he said after tea,

just as Lucy had ended a brilliant Italian sonata. "I have not heard your voice all day."

"No, indeed, my poor little strains would sound infinitely contemptible after Miss Esham's Italian melodies, and spirited martial music, like a trumpet call."

She caught the words. "How do you know they would? Go and try," said she in her quick, commanding tones.

"Do, Helen," pleaded Charles.

"You should use the imperative mood more, Mr. Brotherton."

She came up to me, and pulling my work from my hands, led me like a child to the piano, and putting her hands on my shoulders made me sit down, and said "Sing."

I chose a simple old song, which I knew Charles liked, and she stood by me whilst I sang, and when I had finished signified her approval, and demanded another, and then another.

"You have a sweet, clear, fresh voice, Helen," she said, when the third song was finished, "fit

to sing old ballads of love and constancy, fresh as the primroses in a green country lane, little one," kissing my forehead with a touch of sadness in her voice. "There, Mr. Brotherton, you may thank me for those three songs. Now, Mr. Warrington, may I trouble you to send for a hackney coach for me? I have a ball before me to-night, and must rush home and dress. Good-bye, little Helen," in a whisper, "I am sorry for your cousin, poor fellow. Be kind to him. Good-night, *au revoir* everybody," and away she went, and we praised her for half-an hour after she disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was no leaving the house for Charles the next day, and Esther pleaded so affectionately that he and Aunt Mary would remain altogether where they were, and her arguments were so strongly enforced by his suffering condition, that at last she gained her point. They consented to abjure Mrs. Nobbs for the present, and take up their quarters in the large, handsome, cheerful house in Russell Square, and Esther, triumphant as a child, installed her brother in her most luxurious bedroom, and tended him with unwearied care and tenderness.

But still in that hushed, spacious chamber,

with all those little luxuries doubly needed in weary hours of suffering and prostration, surrounded with so much love and care, he did not grow better. The dark November days wore heavily away, and still he seemed to have neither power nor wish to lift his drooping head from the sofa, while crossing the room with tottering steps was an exertion that made his heart flutter and his brain reel.

The doctor from Brook Street rolled up every day, in his comfortable carriage drawn by two fat brown horses, whose very trot had a sound of snug, monied importance, and driven by a rosy powdered-wigged coachman, whom the little boys in the Square regarded with solemn awe. He was a quick, alert man, of about fifty, of middle height, with a sharp, cheerful voice, and a keen, intelligent, kindly face, whom I took rather a liking to, always dressed with scrupulous neatness, with the invariable gold watch, with its chain and seals, and wearing his hair powdered.

He was a widely different sort of doctor, I

used to think, in his trim attire, and polished aspect, his shining boots, and massive watch chain, and dry courtesy of manner, to our dear old country Esculapius, Dr. Stirling, trudging on his old brown horse through rain, mud, and mire, on his errands of mercy, with his red comforter over his ears, and his hat tied on with a cotton handkerchief, and the great green gingham umbrella that had braved a hundred storms, over his head, to keep the weather off. And yet who shall say that both did not do their work faithfully each in his sphere. I often met Mrs. Clayton, in my drives with Esther in Hyde Park, who always had to ask me whether I had heard from Frank since she met me last, and to charge me to scold him when I next wrote, for writing to me so much oftener than to her. Frank's brave, hopeful letters, full of honest love and daring, were a wonderful solace to me now.

How strange it seems now to think of the times they were read over, with what eager joy

and unshaken faith, of the trembling earnestness with which I prayed God to spare him and bring him back safe to me. I have those letters still—I have never destroyed them—in some old desk, worn and yellow with age.

Nora I caught a glimpse of sometimes, riding with a party of gentlemen, with Mr. Wilson by her side, but it was not often I saw her. Mrs. Clayton used to say, when I asked after her, with her significant laugh and nod, that they generally rode out into the suburbs.

Miss Esham came to see us very often. She had left Mrs. Clayton's, and had gone back to her sister, Lady Cranworth's, the Victoria I had heard her speak of, who was two or three years younger than her, and who, as she said, "had just returned from Brighton with her lord to Park Lane."

"Victoria was a lucky girl," she said one morning when she came to see us. "She played for a high stake and won it."

"What did she win?" I enquired.

"Why, Lord Cramworth, fifty years older than herself, wearing a brown wig, and subject to the gout."

"What a prize!" I could not help saying, laughing at her coolly serious manner.

"Certainly, a first-rate one. He is an M.P., with a charming house in Park Lane, and another in Monmouthshire, and eight thousand a-year besides. Victoria was never considered so good-looking as me—don't laugh at my plain dealing; but there's a fate in these things. I have simpered and ogled for six seasons without being able to hook such a treasure."

I don't know why it gave me an uncomfortable jarring sensation to hear her speak thus. I suppose she saw it.

"Helen looks shocked at my worldliness. Why, you little simple primrose, what do you imagine is the end and aim of the existence of fashionable young ladies, but to make the best matches they can—to strive and struggle after the highest prizes in the matrimonial market of mammon?"

What other chance have they to escape shrivelling up into sour old maids, to be portioned off on a married brother, whose wife hates them. Vanity and vexation of spirit, Helen," with a smile that was half melancholy.

"Oh, Lucy, Heaven help those unfortunate fashionable young ladies of yours! Better be the lowliest dairy-maid that ever sung over her milk-pail, than lose that freshness of the heart, that dew of life, which is too tender a flower to live in the hot glare of this great Babel!"

She smiled at my earnestness, and then sighed, while a flash of emotion passed over her fine features, whose bloom and freshness seemed to have faded unnaturally early.

"You speak like a dear little, fresh, simple soul as you are, Helen; but what would you have? We are brought up with such different ideas, surrounded with such different influences, to you innocent country girls. We grow up in such an unnatural atmosphere, forced like hot-house flowers, with nothing real, healthy, or

natural about us, nothing to inspire simple thoughts, or honest desires, or pure aspirations of love and gratitude. How can we be otherwise than we are? The system is a false one, no doubt, but who can help it? And yet, Helen,—you will hardly believe it—that I once had a real country curate for a lover—my cousin Gerald, fresh from college, with all his classical learning and virgin simplicity fresh upon him. You may stare, but it is true. Poor Gerald! he really loved me, I believe, and I laughed at him. What man can stand that?” and she laughed again, but not very naturally. “Well, peace be with him! He has married a better woman, and has a living in Hertfordshire, and six children; that would hardly have suited me, Helen. Fancy me a country parson’s wife, carrying broth and tracts to sick people! Well,” with a half sigh, “perhaps I had better have been that than what I am now, a faded worldling at six-and-twenty.” She gave a glance at the mirror over the fireplace, and a shade of bitterness passed over her

haughty face, then catching my eyes, she laughed carelessly, as if in defiance of her late softened mood. "I have absolutely been talking sentiment, Helen, a sin of which I am seldom guilty; I have laid all my weak points open to those severe dark eyes of yours, be a lenient judge, I entreat. Here comes the carriage for me, so enough of this twaddle; I promised to drive with Victoria at two—good-bye, little primrose," and she left me to think, as I often did, what a strange, clever, kindly, spoilt being she was.

Christmas was drawing very near, and the weather, as if to do honour to the season, grew bright and frosty; and Uncle Edward, whose letters had long been decidedly misanthropical, became so clamorous for Aunt Mary's return, that it became a serious matter. It would be a dreary Christmas enough any way, with Helen and Nest away, and Charlie ill in London; but a Christmas without Aunt Mary would be a sham and delusion—no Christmas at all in point of fact. The very dinner would be a failure,

and the pudding a heap of ruins; and the usual Holmsley festivities a hollow mockery, without the sustaining and animating spirit of the whole. Who was to see after the Christmas treat to the school-children, and the dinner to the labourers and their wives, and all the hearty old English hospitalities that Uncle Edward in the warmth of his heart, loved to keep up to their fullest extent, like a fine old country gentleman as he was?

These were grave arguments, thought Aunt Mary, and hard to be resisted, but it was harder still to leave Charles, for the first time in her life, ill in London, deprived of a mother's love and patient tending; to have his pale, worn, suffering face haunting her through the bright cheerfulness and comfort of home, with that dreary sense of distance between them. It was a hard strait—there was so many pulling at the large loving heart.

Charles himself urged her to go; said he was much better, and meant to surprise her by running down stairs to meet her when she came

back again; that she deserved a Christmas holiday after all her long and weary nursing, and that Esther would take care of him. We all thought him looking better, so Aunt Mary went with sorrowful unwillingness, leaving him to Esther and I, with many charges to write instantly for her if the slightest unfavourable change took place.

Mr. Warrington invariably gave a dinner party on Christmas Day to several old mercantile friends—sober, comfortable, married gentlemen like himself, with their stately wives and daughters, the latter coming in the evening with overwhelming piles of music, and this was a solemnity that no earthly consideration, short of bankruptcy, would induce him to forego. It was a somewhat oppressive and pompous festival, as I easily divined, with not much seasonable jollity, despite the expensive wines and massive plate. Old Mrs. Warrington had always presided heretofore, an office which, in her crimson velvet turban and plume, she must have filled with sultana-like dignity; but this time, of

course, Mr. Warrington's pretty bride must adorn the head of the table, and poor Esther, who had never before presided at such an important and solemn festivity, felt in no small degree frightened at the responsibility she had to support, and trembled, with all the misgivings of a young and inexperienced housekeeper, at the thought of those solemn merchants, and their critical wives, who had the eyes of hawks to discover the smallest fault in the dinner or the style of serving. It would have been much easier to please a duke than old Rumsford, of Bedford Square, who never thought any dinner worth eating unless he had turtle soup; or Mr. Alfred Liddlemore, of the Stock Exchange, who ever since he paid his first visit to Paris, six years ago, could talk of nothing but French cookery and a *cordons bleu*. It was so unfortunate, that Aunt Mary was obliged to leave just at this time, for her experience in dinner giving would have been of such infinite help, and everything was sure to go off well which she had the management of.

Mr. Warrington, of course, advised Esther to consult his mother, "who had a perfect knowledge of all these matters," but she stood her ground goodhumouredly, but resolutely, against all inroads of the old lady upon her authority, and kept her at bay with a spirit that I applauded, while I wondered at; for Nest knew well that if she adopted the plan of consulting her husband's mother on all occasions, she must bid farewell to being mistress in her own house.

So we had a busy time of it, and between trying to help her as much as I could (which was very little, for I was as inexperienced in these matters as herself) without in any degree neglecting Charles, who needed, since Aunt Mary was gone, more of our care than ever; the short winter days fled by us with such winged speed, that I had no time for sad or anxious thought.

The day before Christmas Day brought letters from Steenie and Frank. They had met on service, and became fast friends: "Stephen Brotherton was the finest fellow on earth," wrote Frank enthusiastically, "and adored

in his regiment. We have become firm allies, and have such long talks about home, and everybody there, especially our little white rose, who will be blushing red over these words, as I well know : God bless her !”

Foolish words enough ; but I carried them in my heart all day, a bright talisman through all the bustle of our morning preparations. I took them forth with me into the winter sunshine, when I went out with Esther, who had no end of purchases to make and orders to execute.

It was a bright sharp frosty day, people’s breath rolling out like white smoke in the clear air, and the brilliant winter sunshine lay over the exhilarating life and bustle of the crowded streets, the shops blazing with Christmas gifts and luxuries, and sparkling with holly boughs, the throngs of happy busy people, the sunny-faced toy laden children, their curls crisped by the keen atmosphere on which their joyous laughter rings out so cheerily : the comfortable, important parents, the bright sense that even the most careworn faces seemed to wear of the

happy season, when some touch of holy gratitude, of gentle household mirth, must enter even the most closed up and scared hearts.

All the world seemed to be buying Christmas presents, so it was very natural to get some little gifts for every body I could think of, though all I could devise for Charles were a few beautiful crimson roses, nestled in green leaves, which tempted me in Covent Garden market, where Esther had numerous purchases to make. He was so fond of flowers, that I thought those lovely roses, at this frosty time, brightening and perfuming his dull room, would be safe to please.

Among the bewildering bustle that overflowed the market, the struggling country people, with their huge baskets and puzzled faces, the more experienced London purchasers, taught by the wisdom of many Christmases to take things more quietly; the glowing fruit and corpulent geese and turkeys, and Herculean vegetables of fabulous prices, whom should we discover but Miss Grimston buying cabbages? She was

holding the arm of a meek, unhappy-looking man, with light hair, a white neckcloth, and a forlorn aspect altogether, whom I set down as the curate from Norfolk, whose wife she had gone to nurse.

He gave one the impression of being "much tumbled up and down in his mind," as John Bunyan has it, by the bustle around him, and was perpetually stumbling, from sheer confusion of senses, over chests of oranges, and getting raved at by indignant fruiterers.

Miss Grimston's lynx eye caught sight of us immediately, and after bestowing on us a greeting in accordance with the weather, so hard and frosty was it, she proceeded to introduce her brother, the Rev. Theophilus Grimston, who returned our salutation with such an air of melancholy and hopeless distraction, that we had much difficulty to avoid laughing.

He had been brought up to town, his sister informed us, by a little business about proving a legacy that had been left him, and she had come up to look after him, and see that he wasn't

cheated, a fact which he corroborated with helpless resignation.

She rallied Esther grimly about disregarding her advice, and putting her neck through the halter, asking her if she didn't repent it already, and finding that she did not, assuring her with ferocious satisfaction that it wouldn't be long before she began to.

They were going back the day after to-morrow, and to-morrow she supposed we should have our hands full of Christmas foolery, therefore she should have no opportunity of calling, for which I am afraid we both breathed a mental thanksgiving. Then adding it was late, and a long tramp to their lodgings in Camden Town, she shoved a heavy basket (which she had set down while talking to us), and a great brown paper parcel into the hands of her forlorn brother, and carried him off with a face of perplexed misery and bewilderment, the recollection of which made Esther and I laugh for five minutes without stopping when we were safe in the carriage.

Miss Grimston was no believer in Christmas. Our commissions and our enjoyment of the bustling, jovial aspect of all things had filled up so much time that it was five o'clock ere we reached home. The sun had gone down, and the frosty stars were twinkling keen and sharp in the clear, stainless heavens, as they might have done on the shepherds of old, ere lost in the glory of the herald angels, and the music of the glad tidings.

As soon as we reached home, I hastened upstairs to Charles's room to give him my roses. It was night there; the curtains closely drawn, and the bright fire shedding a red glow through the quiet room. What an atmosphere of languid stillness fills a sick chamber; to whose weary occupant the glow and fire and throbbing pulses of life are as nothing.

He did not speak as I entered, and going softly to the sofa, I saw he was asleep, the calm of rest on his worn, spiritual features, infinitely more pleasant to see than the distressed look of pain they had worn so often lately. It was no

harm that I bent over him and kissed his forehead, with the sisterly tenderness and pity I had always felt for him. I would not disturb the sleep that I knew was life to his worn out frame, so I placed the roses in a glass of water, on a little table near the sofa, and went softly out, meeting Esther in the passage.

“Run and dress, Nell, dinner is almost ready. How is Charlie—asleep? I must run in and give him a kiss, I have scarcely been able to see him to day, poor boy. Hark! what’s that?”

It was a thundering knock at the front door. The sound must have associated itself insensibly with my late troubled thoughts, for it made me start and tremble, I knew not why, and involuntarily hurry out to the head of the staircase to ascertain what it meant. Esther followed me.

“How strange,” she whispered, “who can it be? Why, how white you are, Helen.”

I might well be so, for the voice I heard from below, and the terrors it brought almost paralysed me.

It was Mrs. Clayton’s strained to an unnatural

pitch, as it seemed, shrill, yet quivering as from an excess of horror, asking for me. I ran down as fast as my shaking limbs and fainting heart would let me.

The first sight of her told me everything; the first glance of her haggard, upturned face, white through her rouge, her shaking voice, her streaming eyes, her piteously wringing hands, all her helpless, impotent grief and terror, standing in the hall, utterly regardless of the stares of the bewildered servants, calling almost frantically for me to hear her woful tidings.

I knew them all before I hurried her into the library, locked the door, made her sit down, fetched her some water, and besought her to tell me calmly, before I tried to nerve myself to hear from her lips, amidst sobs and tears, and hysterical uplifting of her poor trembling hands—she seemed to have grown old within the last few hours—the dark confirmation of the dim forebodings that had haunted me for months, the dreary fulfilment of my heart's sad prophecies—of my mournful night visions.

Nora had fled—on Christmas Eve, on the night when the angels brought glad tidings of salvation from the far heavenly country to the listening, earth, when songs of rejoicing and household gladness went up from all the enlightened world, to the listening stars,—fled from the home where she had been loved, and cherished, and fostered—from the kind old people whose petted darling she had been for years; fled to shame and ruin, leaving behind her the disgrace and sorrow of the living, the outraged memories of the dead.

Fled, blinded and enthralled by the passion that destroys body and soul to the dark and downward road, that though strewn with flowers, and sparkling with sunshine, leads to the chambers of death—fled, under the evil influences of an intoxicating and soul-enthraling dream with her tempter (may God forgive him!) to sin and degradation, and sickening shame and endless remorse!

They knew not how or when she had gone.

Mrs. Clayton had gone out that afternoon for her usual drive in the Park, and Nora had ex-

cused herself from going with her, saying she had a headache.

“She was as bright, and gay, and sweet-tempered as ever only this morning at breakfast,” faltered the poor stricken old woman, choking with her sobs: “there was nothing in her to tell how soon she was to break my heart, and dishonour my old head before the world.”

When she returned (I gathered all this from the confused story, delivered with hysterical moans of grief, and wringing of hands), Nora was gone. The man-servant had admitted Mr. Wilson shortly after his mistress went out, and about an hour after had seen him and Miss Marsden go out together. There was nothing in this to excite the man’s surprise or suspicion—it was such a common occurrence, that he would hardly give it a second thought.

“She had taken all her ornaments, all that belonged to her mother—all that I had given her; the villain took care of that,” said Mrs. Clayton, her tearful half-choked voice quivering with indignation; “he’s a beggar himself, the

natural son of Lord Malverston, with only the allowance his father makes him, barely enough to keep him in kid gloves and cigars. His mother was an opera-dancer, and he's a gamester and a vagabond. A hundred people have told me so; poor Frank has warned me against him over and over again. It serves me right—miserable old fool that I was, to admit such a wretch within my doors; and now he has robbed me of my beauty, my pride, the gem of my solitary house, the pet and darling of my poor old childless heart. What can I do? We have no clue, no trace of where she is gone, no hope of bringing her back. Oh! God forgive her! for she has crushed me to the dust, and brought shame and dishonour on my old head! Thank God, her father has not lived to see this evil day; poor Ernest! She was the pride of his heart. Where can I hide my head? How can I look the world in the face again?"

Exhausted by this violent outburst of grief, she rocked herself backwards and forwards in a silent desperation of misery. What could I say?

What comfort could I speak to this poor heart-crushed woman? What could I do but stand by her, gazing with a sickened heart into that sightless gulf of shame, down into whose depths a form like Nora's was travelling, with a stupefaction of sorrow greater than her own.

A low tap at the door, and Esther's voice of fright and distress entreating to know what had happened, roused me with a painful start. There was nothing for us but to let her in, and tell over again the history of the shame and woe that had fallen upon us, and share with her our grief and terror, and heart-sickness.

Dear Esther, it would be hard not to think gratefully of her loving endeavours to cheer me, and to soothe poor Mrs. Clayton's piteous lamentations. But there was no comfort that night, as it seemed, in heaven or earth, and no hope; the darkness that had fallen upon us had hidden the Christmas stars. When the poor woman grew calmer, she entreated me to come home with her. I suppose it was something to feel that her grief was mine also, that she wanted some

one, however weak and inefficient, to cling to, and to talk to of her misery, and to share her terrors. There are few who have not felt the strange luxury of pouring out a sore and burdened heart even to a human ear, all powerless as the listener is to help or heal.

“Dear Ben,” as she called him, was perfectly useless, utterly stunned and stupefied, poor man, by this awful blow. He was no comfort, I must come with her. She had expected a party of friends to dine with her to-morrow, it had been forgotten in the first fright and misery; I must write notes for her to put them off. The story would be all over London by to-morrow—what would people say?—how could she ever show her face again? And thus she wailed on, distracted between her own great sorrow and her dread of that grinning spectre, the world, who manages ever to inspire his servants with such a wholesome dread of his mandates. And then she dragged me away with her, hurrying to the carriage, with her head bent down and her face

muffled in her cloak, shrinking even from the servants' eyes.

I had no time to see Charles again, or to tell him anything of what had happened, which was perhaps as well, so with a sorrowful embrace from Esther, whose dismay at the direful cloud that had come over our bright Christmas did but increase my desolate heart-sickness, I followed Mrs. Clayton into the carriage, and we drove home through the rejoicing streets, blazing with their brilliant shops, and alive with the gladsome stir and bustle of the time. But a blight and a dark shadow of shame and sin had fallen on our household brightness, and the passionate crying of my own heart, stifled the song of the herald angels, whose echoes shall resound through all time. But I had not time to indulge it yet, nor to sit down and weep out my sore heart over the fallen angel I had almost worshipped—the beautiful, brilliant idol, sunk from the lofty pedestal on which I had set it, in the fervor of my blind admiration, into mire, darkness, and pollution.

When we reached the house—darkened and

shut up, like one over which the shadow of death is brooding, Mrs. Clayton's hysterical moans and plaints burst forth with renewed violence.

She seemed to have changed from the alert, cheerful, bustling little body, I had known, to a feeble old woman; she lay on the sofa, uttering mournful sobs and complaints in an excess of helpless sorrow. To soothe and get her to bed, was the first thing to be done, and in this endeavour I found good aid from the housekeeper, (Williams, her mistress called her), a kind, quiet, middle aged woman, with mild eyes and dark-grey hair, and that reserved, yet gentle manner you often see in persons of her class, who spoke so sorrowfully and tenderly of Annora that I felt I almost loved her. She was so young, she said, pityingly, and so lovely, and so tempted. I thought from her voice, and way of speaking, and from the subdued sorrow in her face, that she might once have had a daughter, who was tempted too, and fell, but she did not tell me so, and I had neither right nor wish to pry into the mother's sacred sorrow.

Poor Mr. Clayton, whose faculties never very acute, seemed utterly distraught by this calamity, was a terrible hindrance in the way of our efforts to get his wife composed; he did nothing but run from one room to another, up-stairs and down, asking every body if they had heard anything of the fugitives, and if proper precautions had been taken to secure them; then sitting down for a moment, he would fall to nodding vacantly at the fire, and then jump up and be off again. At last, the housekeeper who, with her quiet, respectful, but resolute manner, seemed to have considerable influence over him, induced him to go to his own room, and have his dinner there, and this being done, we persuaded Mrs. Clayton to go to bed and take some composing draught, and stayed with her, till worn out with weeping and excitement, the poor woman fell asleep.

Then the housekeeper took me to the room I had slept in when staying in the house, and on the way we passed Nora's deserted chamber; the door was ajar, drawers and boxes half open,

articles of dress scattered about, tokens of her hurried, shameful flight, and the winter moon shining in white and ghastly. I gave one shuddering glance and hastened past; the thought of where she was now smote me with indescribable and oppressive terror.

"It ought not to be left so," the housekeeper said; "I will put things all straight presently. I am sorry you saw them in this state, Miss Helen. Here is your own room. I have had a fire lit, and hope you will be comfortable. Sit down and don't fret more than you can help, poor dear! I wish Mr. Frank was at home for all our sakes; he would be our right hand in a strait like this. Even a look at his bright, handsome face, would be cheering. But sit down in this arm-chair by the fire, and I will fetch you something to eat; you look quite worn out."

"You are very kind; I could not touch anything."

She went, nevertheless, and returned with some refreshment and a glass of wine, pressed me to eat it in such a kind, motherly way, that feeling

faint and sick, I took a few morsels. And then, with a tender good-night, and a parting charge not to fret, she left me, returning in a moment to say that she should sleep in the next room, and that I must not fail to call her, if I felt nervous or lonely.

I thanked her and promised I would, and then she left me alone—to think and weep over the shame and desolation that had fallen on me, even the ruin of the bright creature I loved best on earth, and to cry out to the God whose compassion fails not, for mercy and forgiveness for her. I thought, with an unspeakable agony of soul, over her wrecked beauty, her perverted gifts, her wasted talents, her lost innocence, sinking all into that fit of ruin from which my weak, outstretched arms, could not draw her back.

I thought of her father, whose pride and darling she had been, for whose loss she had grieved so passionately in her bright, childish years; and blessed God that he was where her fall could bring no pang to his soul. I thought of the

shame and sorrow her ruin would bring on the dear name I loved so tenderly; of the dark doom in store for herself; the short glare of intoxicating passion, and feverish joy: then the devouring melancholy, the gnawing remorse, the haunting terrors, the black and hopeless future.

Oh, Nora, Nora! ruined angel, fallen star of my childhood! better a thousand times had we laid you by your father's grave, in the green old churchyard far away, with the crown of girlish innocence, and unstained beauty on your forehead, than you had lived to this evil day. All sounds of footsteps died away through the house, and from the road without, the deep stillness of night fell over the great city, from which rises night and day the wail of broken hearts and crushed hopes, to the ear of Him who neither slumbers nor sleeps: the fire went out, the moon sunk, and through the long night-watches till the stars grew pale, and Christmas Day broke on me cold and grey through the frost that dimmed the pane—I sat and wept for her shame!

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. CLAYTON'S whole system had received so severe a shock that she continued very ill for some days. The knocker was muffled and straw laid down before the doors, deadening the wheels of Dr. Twynford's carriage as it rolled up every day. Poor Mrs. Clayton seemed to have some strange fancy that I was a comfort to her (perhaps because I was something akin to her lost darling), and would not hear of my leaving her.

Perhaps also her having no relations or near friends, who could better supply the place of nurse and comforter, strengthened these fancies, for, although there were shoals of dear friends who rolled up to the door in their carriages, and made sympathetic inquiries, no one ever made

their appearance inside it, to claim by right of kin or old acquaintance, the post of comforter to the poor sorrow stricken, deserted soul.

Esther and Lucy Esham were the two exceptions, for Nest had a heart like her mother's, large and warm enough to hold all her friend's sorrows as well as her own. She came every day, and it would be hard to tell what I should have done, had it not been for her bright face and warm hearted, helpful tenderness.

Lucy, too, had not forsaken us in the day of adversity. She came almost daily to aid in the sick-room, and to relieve me in sitting with Mrs. Clayton (with whom she was a great favourite), and trying to amuse her, saying with her good humoured way of making light of whatever she did, that it was the dull season in Park Lane, and that she had plenty of time on her hands.

Her sorrow was so real, and her pity and horror so honest for the blow that had fallen upon us, for the fate of the bright creature who had been her friend and daily companion, that

I now knew, what I had often dreamt before, that under the cold exterior and the tones of calm polite indifference, and all the faults and follies of the high-bred girl of fashion, trembled the woman's true tender heart, yet unspoilt by the world's treachery.

And of Annora we heard nothing. Into what dark gulf of shameful oblivion she had vanished was a heavy unsolved mystery that weighed on my heart and brain with a speechless agony. All efforts to trace her flight had been made and in vain. Whether the fevered dream of guilty happiness yet lasted, or whether into the darkness of her soul had flashed the intolerable light that must shew her what she was, I know not.

I had ghastly dreams of her, that made me start up and cry out in horror; dreams of her dying of want, standing on the parapet of a bridge, about to plunge into the dark waters below, whilst I vainly struggled to reach and hold her back—facing me with her wild, haggard, ruined beauty, her blue eyes lit with the

fire of desperation, her attenuated hands clenching her torn and faded tresses, looking upon me with a white, fixed despair; or murdered by the hand that had wrought her ruin, coming to me through the darkness of night a ghastly phantom, with a death wound in her breast, and her long golden hair dabbled in blood, moaning in the last agonies that it was not he that did it, that he was innocent, and so dying, her glazing eyes on my face.

Such were the dreams that broke my rest; but by day I thought of the sister I had lost by a living death with unutterable sorrow, and pity, and affright; of her rare beauty, her bewitching gifts, her bright talents, her endearing ways.

And poor Steenie! a letter from him to her came a few days after her flight, full of vows of constancy and glowing hopes for the future, and I thrust it from me with a kind of agony.

Who should tell him of the fall of her he loved with every pulse of his young, brave, generous heart? Not I; I dared not. And Frank,

who had looked on her almost as a sister—on how many hearts would her ruin bring sorrow and shame.

It was the morning after that on which Steenie's letter had come, when Williams told me, as I was sitting in Mrs. Clayton's room, that a gentleman was in the drawing-room waiting to see me. I flew down with a beating heart, and ran into Uncle Edward's arms.

I had scarcely dreamt of the unspeakable comfort it would be to nestle on his breast, to lay my weary head on his arm, and sob out my heavy heart there. He had come up to see if he could be any help to us in this sore trouble, and to see after his little wandering lassie. He had brought Maude up with him, who was crazy to see me again, but he thought it best to come alone at first and leave her with Esther.

"So pale and worn out," said he, stroking my hair with the pitying gentleness of a woman, and drawing me closer to him. "Poor little soul; and how can I comfort thee in this sore

grief? She was a wicked lass, Nelly, to bring shame and woe on thy guiltless head and innocent heart. Well, well, I wont vex thee and I won't speak hardly of her, poor lost lamb."

"Oh, dear uncle, is there no hope—none?"

"Hush, my love, it rends my heart to hear thee cry so bitterly. I wish we had some clue, Nell, only the faintest and weakest, I'd follow her, if it were to America, and bring her back if I knocked the villain who has ruined her on the head. I'd go the length of the habitable earth to save poor Ernest's child from ruin and misery, but how should I find her? I wish I had been here, more active measures might have been taken; the poor old folks, no doubt, were stunned by the blow, and lost time in weeping and wailing. God help them! It was a cruel deed, Nell, to dishonour their grey hairs who had done so much for her; but God forgive the poor lass, she was dazzled and blinded, and went like a bird into the snare, and knew not it was for her life! And poor Mary, too, she grieved almost as though it had been her own daughter, for she loved the

child well. Who could help loving such a bright lovely creature?"

He looked sorrowfully at the fire, and wiped off with his hand the moisture that hung on his grey eyelashes.

"And I was her guardian, too!" he went on, with some self-reproach in his voice, "my heart misgives me that I ought to ha' looked more closely after her. She'd have been better with us at old Holmsley than here in this great London, full of snares and sins, and in the hands of these kind, foolish old folks, who left her to her own wild will, and God only knows if we'd kept her with us whether she might not have escaped! Well, well, these thoughts come too late!"

Too late!—the words sounded like a knell, and they woke up within me an echo of remorse. Perhaps if I had not been so selfishly engrossed in my own heart-happiness, who knows but I might have held her back from the downward road. But it was the bitterest of all mockeries to think of that now!

"When shall we have thee home, lassie?" said

Uncle Edward, as I half lay on the sofa beside him, my head resting on his shoulder and his arm supporting me tenderly, "they all miss thy sweet face sadly, and Peggy is always asking after thee, and little Jessie Macdonald, and Mary, and all of 'em, and little Ned's always plaguing his mother after Aunt Nelly, and—but, Lord forgive me! I've set her crying again, poor lamb."

The thought of the old quiet home, and the dear familiar faces, made my tears fall faster. What a haven of rest seemed the old grey weather-stained house, standing amidst its still green woods and meadows, the bright hearth, where first, in my chilled and solitary childhood, I had found love and shelter; a haven to which I yearned to carry back my pierced heart and bleeding feet, weary with the roughness of the world!

"You don't know how I am longing to go back, dear uncle—it seems I have known nothing but sorrow since I left the dear old home. But Mrs. Clayton is so ill, poor thing, and fancies that I am some comfort to her—she was so fond of—of—"

“ Aye, I understand—and thou art a good little grateful soul, my Nell—God bless thee! Well, well, stay and comfort the poor soul, as is right, but take care of thyself. I don’t like thy pale looks, lassie. I’m thinking to stay a week at Esther’s, though I can’t feel at home in that fine house of hers, where a man’s afraid to set his boots on the carpet for fear of soiling it, nor with her stately chap of a husband, that picks and chooses his words so finely, that he bewilders a plain, countrified old fellow like me. However, the child looks happy enough—heaven bless her! with the same bright face and warm heart as ever, (he can’t freeze that, I fancy), and so I’ve nothing to complain of. I shall tell her to look sharp after thee, Nelly. I only wished she lived nearer—and if thy looks don’t improve, I’ll just carry the off home with me, in spite of all the sick old women in London.”

He patted my forehead lovingly, as one might encourage a weary child, and like one, I yielded to the soothing of the great tender hand.

“ A week of this will tire me out, I fancy, for

this London bewilders a plain man's senses, and turn his very brain inside out. I'm glad to see thee laugh, Nelly; why, the noise, and rout, and rattle of wheels make one's head spin round, and the crossings put one in fear of one's life. Only coming here this morning, I had three blessed escapes from being run over, besides getting my pockets picked—only of a few shillings luckily—for I'd left all the money I brought with me at Esther's, and then I called a hackney coach. Thinks I, a man ought to insure his life, and make his last will and testament before he comes to London; and then he need be made of coppers, for the beggars and the ragged children, and the little crossing-sweepers—Lord help them! are enough to melt a heart of stone; and it's hard to believe what Warrington says, that they are all rogues and impostors. But then I'm but a country booby: I'm thankful to see thee smile, little lassie," kissing me as he spoke, "before I leave thee for awhile, for I promised to take Maude for a walk, to get a look at the outside of London; the child's head is turned,

for she's never seen it before, and bring her here this evening if you can hold out so long. I left her hugging and kissing Charlie—for they've never been parted before, and she hardly knows how to make enough of him. You'd hardly believe, Nell, how we missed Charlie."

"Indeed! I can believe it easily; poor fellow, I had not time to wish him good-bye when I left Esther's on that terrible Christmas Eve. Do you think him looking better?"

"Well, I hardly know; Maude thinks so, but I doubt whether this fine London doctor has done him much more good than old Stirling would have done. However, all the doctors in the land could not cure him, I'm afraid, poor lad; and since he seems to have got the better of that lameness we must be thankful. Maude had just persuaded him to go out into the Square with her for a breath of fresh air, which is hard to get in London, I fancy. Well, God bless thee, Nelly, look to see us this evening, and keep up thy spirits, lassie. Promise me not to fret for all our sakes."

And so with a warm fatherly hug, and hearty kiss he left me, and when his strong, tender, cheery presence was withdrawn, I felt as if the very sunshine was clouded. Perhaps my counting the hours till evening made the day seem unusually long and dreary, but evening came at last, and Maude with it. Dear Maudie! tender simple, loving hearted little soul; for how long afterwards, the remembrance of how she clung to me, and cried and laughed and cried again, and chid herself so prettily for her folly, made my tears run fast.

She exclaimed so sorrowfully at my pale looks, and entreated me so touchingly to take care of myself for her sake, that I was obliged half-jestingly to scold her for trying to make me nervous and foolish. Lucy was in Mrs. Clayton's room when they arrived, and she came down as the bearer of polite and hospitable messages from the poor lady, who even in sickness and affliction, had not forgotten her good manners and old kindness. Then Lucy asked me in her graceful way to introduce her, and addressed

Uncle Edward and Maude in the kind courteous manner she could assume so well, and which conquered them both.

My uncle was sent for by Mrs. Clayton, who was sitting up in her room, and wished to see him—a dreary interview, from which he came down with a deep shadow on his honest face, and a mist in his gray eyes. Then while he was gone, Lucy exerted herself to draw out Maude, who was evidently a little afraid of the tall, stately fashionable young lady, in her rustling silken robes, and succeeded so well, that they were like old friends long before Uncle Edward came down, Lucy listening with what seemed real interest and amusement to Maude's pretty prattle of her first delighted impressions of London and its wonders.

A regiment of the Life Guards rode by, their accoutrements flashing in the evening sun, calling from Maude a burst of childlike admiration and wonderment, and Lucy's laugh was half envious, I fancied, as she listened to her. They were a strange contrast, these two daugh-

ters of Eve, I thought, looking at them as they stood near each other, the calm indifferent world-wearied lady of fashion, worn and faded by late hours and hot rooms, and the feverish whirl of an existence where rest and thought are unknown words, handsome and haughty; and the fresh country girl, pure and simple as a newly-blown rose with the dew on its leaves, with all the sweet fancies and delicious hopes of youth fresh and undimmed on her bright cheek and glad eyes, and what a gulf was there between the weary experiences of the one, to whom life and its changes, its joys and sorrows, seemed a worn-out vanity, and the innocent imaginings of the other, to whom it was a glistening dream, lit with the sunshine of hope and fancy, and bright longings.

Mr. Clayton made his appearance before Uncle Edward came down from upstairs, somewhat to Lucy's and my surprise, for he had lately, since the routine of the house had been so changed and visitors came no more, taken to secluding himself in a little private sitting-room

he had upstairs, where he had the satisfaction of feeling himself out of the way. There he amused himself, as Williams the housekeeper told us, by writing long letters that never were sent, and by copying old business papers, which last duty he was very strict in fulfilling, for though he had long given all active share in the affairs of the bank at Harlington to his nephew and head partner, and was only the nominal chief of the firm of Clayton and Gilders, he loved to keep up a little fiction of business, and liked nothing better than to be consulted by his nephew upon any minor transactions, on which occasions he would deliver his opinion in writing in solemn form:

Poor Mr. Clayton! I believe his simple wits were more hopelessly entangled than ever since the dreary change in the house, for he had even abandoned his attempts at conversation with me, and always sat, when in the drawing-room, silently over the fire, rubbing his head in a perplexed fashion, that might have made one laugh had it not been rather melancholy. I suppose he was

trying desperately hard to determine what the matter was; if so, I am afraid he never succeeded.

Now, however, he greeted Maude and Uncle Edward with bland solemnity, and did his utmost to induce them to stay to dinner, a ceremony he went through with everybody who entered the house, no matter who they might be.

One motive was, I think, the anticipation of carving, for I really believe he had a great pleasure in brandishing a huge knife and fork, and whipping off thin slices in an artistic manner. Hearing, however, that they were expected back to dinner in Russell-square, he meekly expressed his regret, and retired to his seat beside the fire, fell to rubbing his head in his usual bewildered fashion, trying, I imagine, to demonstrate clearly to himself the motive of their visit. This he evidently was unable to do satisfactorily, for shortly after he rose, and making, with much politeness, an excuse of pressing business, retired up stairs with a forlorn and puzzled aspect.

Lucy was charmed with Maude and my uncle,

and gave her admiration vent as soon as they were gone.

“There was something so delightfully queer and original,” said she, “in Uncle Edward’s honest bluntness, one might fancy such as he the living bulwarks of their native land, worthy sons of old England. There is such a pure healthy atmosphere about him, like a breezy morning in the country, when the fresh wind wantons over cornfields and orchards, bearing off all wholesome, delicious scents on its wings. Can’t I talk like a farmer’s daughter?” bursting into her gay laugh, which had always to my ears a half-sorrowful echo; “he is absolutely redolent of daisies and green turf, and he would shed that open, breezy, hearty influence of his wherever he went, in the darkest dens of mammon and the most perfumed drawing-rooms in this great Babylon. He is a man rather different from your scented town coxcombs, one who worships God with all his heart, and walks in the honest simple ways his fathers did before him. Am I not right?”

"What a quick eye you have for character; that is Uncle Edward to the life."

"And dwells in a picturesque old grange, with a large porch, overgrown with hanging roses, and with broad green meadows and shadowy woods stretching around it?"

"Yes, that is dear old Holmsley; you must have seen it in your dreams, Lucy."

"Perhaps; I should like to see it in reality."

"So you shall, Lucy, and before long; that is, if you will come."

"Nay; I don't promise, for I have a shrewd notion that though I may talk very poetically about the country, I should die of ennui were I in it long; besides, I should be so lamentably out of my element in your dear good simple household that I should be a nuisance to you, and a weariness to myself. Nay; don't begin to protest this is only idle speculation. What a lovely little country rosebud is that cousin Maude of yours. I have a great admiration, a half-envy of little fresh, rosy innocent simpletons. Such a voice and laugh, too; like a lark upspringing

with the dew on its wings. But there she sits, dreaming of Frank, and I speak to deaf ears," Lucy said, after a pause. "Well, Nell, all this nonsensical prattle of mine has at least been dignified with a good motive to drive away dull care."

"Yes, I know you are very kind to me," I answered wearily, leaning my cold cheek on her arm, as she drew closer to me, with a half caring gesture.

"Pshaw, dear child!" She spoke cheerily, but her voice shook a little. "Don't grieve so passionately for the sins of others, when the world lies fair before you, lit with your young, bright love-dream. Be thankful, Nell, that they are not your own errors you have to weep for."

I thought, with something like terror, that both the great sorrows of my life sprang from the sins of others; but the thought faded like a ghost into the weary faintness that closed over me with the twilight of the winter evening.

I awoke to find myself in bed, feeling strangely weak and confused and helpless, and there I re-

mained all that day, dosing languidly the greater part of the time, and kindly tended by Lucy and Williams. They would fain have called in Dr. Twynford, but this I resisted so strenuously, and entreated them besides so earnestly not to let anybody in Russell Square know of my being unwell, that seeing, I suppose, that nothing ailed me, save weakness and weariness, and that all I needed was rest of mind and body, that they mercifully listened to me, and were rewarded by my being well enough to get up the next day, and go into Mrs. Clayton's room, to pacify her anxious demands after me.

She grew better sooner than we all expected, for she was naturally a woman of a stout heart, and a strong bodily constitution, and these stood her in good stead; but she never regained her cheerful spirits; her old alertness of speech and manners. From being a hearty kindly woman, with a sound constitution and a serene temperament, who took her ample share of the good things of life easily, and enjoyed them heartily, without much thought beyond the present, she

became sickly, nervous, and irritable, subject to continual fits of low spirits, and full of fanciful complaints. She had been wounded in her love and her pride; she had been dishonoured and cruelly mortified before the world. The sunshine that had gladdened her childless hearth had gone out in darkness, and she was forlorn and spirit-crushed.

Poor woman! What marvel that she had grown old in a few days;—thin, pale, and hollow-cheeked; captious and fretful; continually complaining, with that tremulous motion of her hands?

What marvel if she kept the carriage blinds so carefully drawn down when she drove out, shrinking with morbid nervousness from the eyes of a world that has small mercy for the faults and failings of its followers?

And Nora saw not the wreck she had made, and whether in her soul had yet awoke the un-availing agony of remorse and haunting memories of what she had lost for ever, was known only to the Judge of all the earth.

I was alone—away from those who would have comforted and upheld my weakness, away from Frank, on whose strong arm and brave heart I could have leant so confidently; and his letters, earnest, and hearty, and encouraging as they were, could be but poor substitutes for his dear living presence, for which I longed now with a longing I had never known before.

Poor Maudie wrote me loving little notes, full of grievous disappointment at our separation—she had hoped we should enjoy our first visit to London together. What a splendid house Esther's was, and how happy she seemed, and what a delightful bewildering place was London altogether, and the theatres, just like fairy land, said the little simple heart, dancing and fluttering in the glow of life's sunshine, and the undimmed newness and beauty of the world.

Uncle Edward had gone back to Holmsley, after a fortnight's stay in Russell Square, oppressed with an alarming sense of the business that must be awaiting him at home, half stifled as he said with London smoke, and longing for

a draught of fresh country air. London had afflicted him rather uncomfortably, I think, with an overpowering sense of grandeur, and the noise and roar of the streets, and the whirl of traffic deafened and bewildered him. He was very profoundly impressed with the Bank, the Royal Exchange, and the Houses of Parliament, for Esther had taken all due pains that he should escape nothing worth seeing, and admired the Parks greatly, as the only places a man could get a whiff of fresh air; but I believe his whole experiences of the great Babylon produced in him a decided confusion of senses.

London was a wonderful place, but he should be glad to find himself on a green country road again, where a man could walk without fear of his life, and whistle without being stared at, and to rejoice in all the old fresh country sights and scents; I heard all this when Uncle Edward came to wish me good-bye, and grew so angry at my pale looks that I had much difficulty to withhold him from rushing in to Mrs. Clayton and insisting on carrying me off forcibly.

I tried to laugh off his fears, and to keep a brave face when he spoke of how grieved Aunt Mary would be at his returning without me. And then I promised to return with Maude, whom Esther would not part with just yet, and at last, when he was gone, after holding me close to his good, honest heart, and charging me to take care of myself, as I was very precious to them all, I threw myself on the sofa and gave way to weak, desponding tears.

Lucy Esham's entrance roused me; I started up, feeling vexed that her dark, severe eyes should be witness of my weakness.

"Well, Helen," she did not notice my disorder, for which I felt grateful, "I have just encountered that jovial uncle of yours on the stairs, and had a squeeze of the hand enough to dislocate the fingers of most fine ladies; mine absolutely pain still," wringing them with a half grimace. "So he is going back to his native hills, and thankful for it no doubt. He must have been half smothered in this atmosphere of smoke and artificiality. And you are crying, O! little simpleton, I must

begin my task already I see, for I promised your uncle to look after you, and keep your spirits up. It is something to be loved as you are, Nell," with a touch of emotion in her calm, indifferent voice, "and yet here she sits all tears. Pshaw, child, forget the past and its tormenting dreams. Can no wise man invent a specific for the stings of memory? what gold would flow into his coffers! Well, to the winds with sentimentality. What would you give me to know what this is?"

It was a large drawing that she carried of a head, the size of life, covered with silver paper.

"A picture, I suppose."

"Ay, but whose?"

I felt too listless and miserable to care much.

"Not a whit cares she, by her face, but shut your eyes and listen, Nell, if you choose, for my story I'll e'en tell. I'm glad Charlie does not see those drooping lids and tear-fraught lashes, they would be fatal to his peace of mind, if that is not irrevocably lost already."

Her mention of Charles reminded me that I

had forgotten to ask Uncle Edward how he was, and this was a weary vexation.

"Oh, Lucy, I am getting miserably selfish! Think of my forgetting to ask after the poor fellow, when I know that anything like neglect wounds him so deeply."

"Doubtless, but you have wounded him so deeply already that you need not be so scrupulous of inflicting another stab. I wish you no worse punishment than that his mournful blue eyes may haunt your dreams all night."

"Dear Lucy, I am in no mood for jesting. How can you always keep up this ridiculous strain?"

"I am as serious as a parson's wife at a missionary tea-drinking, Helen, and so to my story, for tell it I will. You must know that this morning, finding Victoria extremely ill-tempered, owing to a mis-fit in a new dress, and her lord more than usually unbearable, I took the carriage and drove to Russell Square."

"Indeed!"

“Esther and the rosebud (Maude, of course, I mean) were deep in the fabrication of some wonderfully diminutive doll-looking things, which they bustled away with a great deal of blushing and laughing as I came in; and Charles, looking the most interesting of love-sick young artists—nay, don’t get angry—was sitting at an easel, surrounded with pencils, chinks, and such a litter as nobody but a privileged being like himself would dare to make in a lady’s drawing-room—putting the finishing touches to this drawing. Look.” She raised the silver paper and showed me—a very flattered likeness of myself. Lucy laughed at my amazement.

“It is you to the very life, Nell; the straight-forward, earnest look of your clear eyes, the long lashes, the curve of the lip that has some quiet wickedness in it, the very turn of the head; and done from memory, too! How very clearly he must have your features stamped upon his heart and brain.”

“It was very strange he should think of drawing me, when you, or Esther, or Maude would

have made so much better a subject," I said quite honestly.

"Very strange; there's no accounting for these things, Helen. However, there is your portrait, a little flattered, if you will, which is natural enough under the circumstances, but an admirable likeness. I took all sorts of solemn pledges to send it back safe to-night, and he has promised to copy it for me. I shall hang it up in my bedroom to remind me of your good, little face, Nell, when we have said farewell."

I leant my head on the sofa, and gazed at her with lustreless eyes, wondering with a sickly listlessness, why Charles should take the trouble of drawing my likeness.

"Well, what say you to your portrait; doesn't it deserve a word of commendation?"

"It is beautifully done, Lucy, but what could make him think—"

"Of drawing your face from memory? a mystery, Nell. Perhaps because there is no face in the wide world that he loves better than this silly, little countenance."

“Pshaw!” I said angrily. The idea, absurd as I felt it was, vexed and jarred upon me.

“What a flinty, little heart that is of yours. Well, poor Charlie goes back to green fields to-morrow with his father, and there may he learn wisdom.”

“Charles goes to-morrow? How strange; Uncle Edward never said so!”

“True, nevertheless. I wish I could demonstrate to your satisfaction that the wisest thing he could do was to go away. I assure you I thought so, and bestowed upon him a hearty farewell, and wishes for good luck, with which I always speed my departing friends. I did ask him if he had no message for you, and he said, ‘say good-bye to her for me,’ in that melancholy musical voice of his, which even melted old Dr. Twynford’s professional ice; for he mentioned him here the other day, and said he really took an unusual interest in that poor young Brotherton. However, Nell, men seldom die for love; that fact was established in Shakspeare’s days—as Beatrice bears

witness—and long before, very likely; and for my part, I am very incredulous as to anybody ever having died of that interesting passion. Depend on it there was always some other mortal disease at work. Men and women may die of wrath, despair, spleen, malice, disappointment, jealousy; these, and such as these, may corrupt the springs of life, and eat the heart away; but not love: it is too puny a passion.”

“Lucy, Lucy! You a woman, and speak thus of the purest, highest passion of the human heart, given by God, to dignify the soul of man, and smooth and gladden the rough ways of this weary earth! What wondrous transformations have been wrought by the magic influence of honest love—what stubborn evil natures has it changed and purified—what acts of self-denial has it prompted—what heroes and heroines has it made; what a glory belongs to it—the essence of all that is good and true, and noble in this mortal life!”

“Well spoken, Helen”—she laughed good naturedly at my earnestness—“and bravely; I

like to see your pale cheek flushing and kindling with that heart eloquence of yours. Perhaps you are the most enviable mortal on earth's surface—a pure-hearted girl in her first love dream. I believe I never was in love in my life, little friend; never yet saw the man into whose hands I could give my heart, and never shall, as I shrewdly fancy. There was never the least tincture of romance in my cold nature; and those love-fits, that most girls in their teens are troubled with—or delighted with, as you will—I never knew; and yet I am half sorry sometimes that I had not my share of these bright delusions. They do no harm, and possibly—don't wax indignant again—they do elevate the human nature, lift it out of its selfishness for a while; so I am half inclined to envy that little fluttering heart of yours, throbbing with its bright dreams; long may they last, Nell," and bending over me, as I lay on the sofa, she kissed my cheek.

"Dear Lucy, you take immense pains to make me think the worst of you, but you shan't suc-

ceed; I never will believe that your heart is quite such an adamantine substance as you would fain persuade me it is."

"Well, think of me at my best," she said, half gaily, half sadly; "cover my faults with your mantle of charity—if it is wide enough."

"Of love, Lucy—that puny passion of yours, which Solomon bore witness, was 'as strong as death.'"

"Well, I retract all I said, and will even confess, to please you, that love rules the world, 'the court, the camp, the grove,' as the latest minstrel sings—instead of mammon, which was my rooted conviction a few minutes ago. There goes Mrs. Clayton's bell; she has awoke from her nap, and that is a hint she wants somebody to amuse her; so I'm going to take my turn, do you lie still and dream on by this red fire-light—the very time for dreams."

So she left me, and I fell to speculating about her, as I always did after talking to her, on what a strange, incomprehensible, attractive mixture she was; of goodness and worldliness, of fire

and ice, and how I liked and yet half-feared her; so cold and careless, and yet so kind-hearted: and then of Charles's strange conduct, but that vexed and puzzled me, and I took out Frank's last letter for comfort. And so, after reading it over again and then lying still gazing at the dancing shadows and flashing firelight, and thinking of him, I dropped asleep for weariness, to meet him in dreamland.

CHAPTER X.

ANOTHER month rolled away, and I was still with Mrs. Clayton, but as the spring advanced, and the trees in the park were budding into green (for it was a mild and forward season), Dr. Twynford issued his mandate that she should seek change of air, and a sea-side place in Devonshire was fixed on.

She was impatient to get out of London before the bustle of the season set in, for the same morbid dread of seeing her former friends was as strong upon her as ever, and she evidently feared that when the full tide of life set into the sunlit city, and the rush of pleasure and business overwhelmed all past recollections and old griefs, that she might be dragged against her will into

the current, and forced by the terror of that grim phantom of worldly opinion to throw her house open as of old.

Some such fright, I really believe, possessed her, for she hurried her preparations for departure with a nervous impatience that surprised me, and to my dismay, I found out one day that she expected me to go with her into Devonshire. She had grown strangely attached to me, perhaps partly because I was connected with Frank, and her affection for him. We were her two children now, she said, I must fill the place of her who had so cruelly deserted her (she never uttered Nora's name); as soon as Frank was a captain, he should leave the army, we should be married, and live with her; all she had meant to leave Nora should be ours. The idea of taking the place and the rights of my lost sister, was so inexpressibly painful to me that I always tried to change the subject when she spoke thus.

Poor Mr. Clayton went for nothing in her consideration. Since her trouble she had grown peevish towards him; he should go down to Har-

lington, and stay with his nephew, and see how the bank prospered, and amuse himself as best he could, which prospect, I thought, seemed to lift a great weight from his mind, and gladden him greatly.

This nephew was a Mr. Theodore Gilders, head partner of the firm, and carrier-on of the business, an elaborate young gentleman, with a quantity of light, curly hair, and white, pasty-looking hands, adorned with a quantity of massive rings, which he was always displaying very unnecessarily, and who always thought it incumbent on him before coming into the presence of ladies to drench his handkerchief with lavender-water to that extent that he resembled a walking perfumer's shop.

He was a great favourite of Mr. Clayton's who regarded him as a being endowed with super-human acuteness, and of course Mrs. Clayton had a great aversion to him. I had seen him once or twice, when he had come up from Harlington on a dutiful errand of enquiry after his aunt's health, on which occasions she declaring that his manners and appearance altogether was something

beneath those of a shop-boy, snubbed him so decidedly that I really felt compassion for the poor man.

"He was vulgar," Mrs. Clayton said; "vulgar all over;—hands, feet, rings, boots, and voice; and vulgarity she never could pardon."

"Poor dear Ben's family, my love," she would tell me in moment's of confidence, "were sadly low-bred people; poor things! His nephew—this dreadful young man with the rings and the lavender water—is a specimen of them all. They were all sharp, shrewd people, and fought their way up in the world like those people always do, and it's very honourable and praiseworthy of course, and so on. But vulgarity, my dear, is a terrible thing."

It was to this doomed nephew, who, notwithstanding his hopeless bane of vulgarity, managed the business very shrewdly, and lived very snugly in his uncle's comfortable house at Harlington—always turning out when Mrs. Clayton went down there—that Mr. Clayton was to pay a visit during his wife's stay in Devonshire, to

which place she had settled I was to go with her.

I had long been so wearily longing to return home, that this announcement sounded most mournful to me. The thought of an indefinitely prolonged absence, fell with a dreary, hopeless weight on my senses.

It was very hard to refuse the poor soul, lamenting so piteously her loneliness and deserted age; and I must have yielded had not Lucy, like a good angel, came to my rescue, and with real kindness, for which I loved her most gratefully, offered to go in my place, saying, with a careless smile, that she wanted a change, and had seen so many London seasons that she could afford to miss the first few weeks of one. And she dwelt so cleverly on my paleness, and evident pining for my native air, that Mrs. Clayton, conscious, perhaps, that she would prove a far cleverer and more amusing companion than I should, accepted the substitute, and I cried out my thanks on Lucy's shoulder, and got laughed at for my silliness.

And we went home, Maude and I together, and found at dear old familiar Haverford Uncle Edward waiting with the carriage, and the stout brown horse, old Ned (called so after his master I suppose), to take us home; and in the back ground, Joe Stevens, with the cart for our luggage, grinning a cordial welcome from his great stupid blue eyes.

I believe in the fullness of my joy I could have kissed Joe, and as wearied with our long coach ride, we drove home over the old familiar track, through the soft lights and shadows of the mild April evening, and saw the dear old home, bright with the reviving beauty of the spring-time, I could have sobbed like a child for very thankfulness.

Peggy was the first to hurry out and welcome us, and the sight of her dear, loving, old red face was too much for my self-command, and my tears would force their way as I clasped her round the neck and kissed her with all my heart, and heard her half smothered greeting:

“Lord love thy tender face; I most thought never to see it again.”

They came thicker and faster, with impetuous rising sobs that would not be held in, when I found myself clinging to Aunt Mary's neck. It was the first time I had seen her since my great sorrow, and I wanted to draw strength from the faith and wisdom of that large, tender soul.

But I missed some one as I glanced round the room. “Where is Charles, Auntie? I have a good lecture in store for him, for leaving London in such an unaccountable way, without wishing me good bye.”

“You must keep it a little longer, Nelly. Charles is not at home: he is gone with Mary to Denscliff, for two or three weeks.”

This was a pretty little sea-side village, about sixteen miles from Haverford, where we often made short visits in the summer.

This sudden departure of Charles was perplexing, it seemed as though he had some strange wish to avoid me.

“Charles gone!” and Maude echoed the words “how strange!”

“Why?” said Aunt Mary with a smile, “little Ned has been very ailing all the winter, and as he always seemed so much better and happier by the sea-side, Mary has taken him to Denscliff for a little while, and Charlie seemed so dull and listless without you all, that she persuaded him to go too, in hopes the fresh sea breezes would cheer him up a little, and drive away the effects of London smoke.”

I felt sorry he was gone, vexed and saddened at another empty place in the home circle now so thinned. It was pleasant to be at home again in the old quiet haven of beloved faces; but still a gloom rested over the evening through which the memories of the dead and absent showed dim and ghostly. Even Maude’s merry prattle of London and its wonders, and Uncle Edward’s kindly heartiness could not drive away those spectres.

I was dreaming, too, with all the shadowy fears of my cowardly woman’s heart, of Frank, for

Napoleon had escaped from Elba, and the startled world flew to arms, and he, round whom at that trembling time all the pulses of my heart seemed wound, was rejoicing with his whole soul in the renewal of the old stirring war-times, and the hope of promotion and the thirst of fame, and all the glowing visions and keen longings of his brave, daring nature, were rising as on eagles' wings, and my woman's lot was to sit and "greet at home," to weep, tremble, and pray.

And the shadows on the horizon were black and menacing. It was only the day after I came home, while sitting dreamily on the terrace, that Aunt Mary came out to me with a foreign letter in her hand.

A chill fell upon me.

"More sorrow, Aunt Mary?"

She gave me a vague, troubled look. "A letter from Steenie; come up into my room."

I followed her with a trembling heart, and when we reached her room, and were shut in alone, she gave me the letter, and sitting down covered her eyes with her hand. It was from Steenie, and

though the first lines made my heart sick, I read on by a desperate effort to the end.

He had seen Annora; she was with Mr. Wilson, at Brussels; he had met her at a ball, looking brilliantly beautiful, leaning on her seducer's arm—the agony of the boy's brave heart spoke out in every unsteady line. He had found an opportunity of speaking to her—asked her the one imploring terrible question, if she was married?—besought her to answer him, and she had turned on him a face where the whiteness of despair made her beauty ghastly, and fainted. He needed no other reply, and when the bustle of removing her from the ball-room was over, burning with his passionate grief and resentment, and indignant sense of wrong, he had sought out Mr. Wilson, accused him of his villainy, and struck him with the hilt of his sword. He made a fiery retort, a duel followed, they fought at daybreak, in the outskirts of the city, and Steenie was wounded in the shoulder. His adversary escaped with a very trifling hurt.

The letter was written with evident difficulty

and incoherently, as though by one in pain. I could see no more for the tears that blinded me.

“Oh, Aunt Mary, nothing but sorrow have I and mine brought upon you!” I cried out in the bitterness of my soul.

She raised her head from its drooping posture and I saw that even through the mother’s sorrow in her eyes, shone tender compassion for me. “We must be patient, Nelly; it is the confirmation of our worse dread, my poor darling. We must remember now that His compassion fails not.” She rose up, a strong angel, and held out her arms to me.

“But Steenie—that he should be hurt! Poor brave, noble fellow!” I sobbed, in indignant sorrow.

“It is a slight wound, thank God! See, here is a letter enclosed from Frank, which you have dropped; he was Steenie’s second (you’ll forgive my having read it, Nelly), and he says the wound is not dangerous, only very painful. Won’t you read it?”

“Steenie and I (said the letter) had rather a

hot argument beforehand who should fight the scoundrel, but as he insisted his was the best right, I gave it up to him. The sight of his blood maddened me, and as he could not fire again, I challenged Wilson to another shot. He is one of those cool, deliberate rascals, who fear neither man nor devil; so he readily agreed, and we fired. His ball grazed my cheek, and mine, to my intense satisfaction, fractured his left arm. It is but right he should smart a little for the ruin of the loveliest girl on God's earth. Poor, poor Nora! I have cried like a child over her fate, but where's the use of vexing your little sorrowful heart, my sweet Nell! Think how I love you and trust in my faith—if that is any comfort. I don't think this affair will bring us into a scrape at head-quarters, for Wilson will keep it quiet for the sake of his own reputation, considerably damaged already my gambling transactions. Poor, unfortunate Nora, passes as his wife—Mrs. Wilson; but he must be the greatest scoundrel unhung for an officer of ours, who knew him very well a few years ago, and got pigeoned by him

pretty often at cards, swears that he has a wife living in Wales, to his certain knowledge. But enough of this black story—unfit for your pure eyes. Steenie is going on very well, poor fellow, if he were not so wretched about this miserable business, and sends his love to you all. ‘Tell Nelly to pray for poor Nora,’ he says.”

Ay, pray for her, Steenie, for the lost angel of your life—the fallen star of your boyhood! There was now nothing more to hope or fear, our darkest dread had been confirmed. Uncle Edward in the heat of his honest indignation, talked eagerly of setting off for Brussels, and compelling her seducer to marry her, but it was so wild and hopeless a project that none of us dare encourage it, and so it died away. We ceased to mention her name: the shadows that rested on it were black and irrevocable.

CHAPTER XI.

MY recollections of the terrible time I am now going to write of, are very dim and indistinct. Even at this distance of time, though I have prayed and struggled for years to forget them, the thoughts of it makes my old brain reel and swim. To write of it, is like entering on the frozen air of some icy region of death. I have still his last letter, a few hurried lines written on the eve of the last great battle, from the Duchess of Richmond's ball, when the alarm of the advancing enemy broke in upon the revelry, and news came to the chief whose fame is the theme of song and story, and whose great heart never knew one throb of fear, that the foe were upon him.

A few hurried lines, blessing me, and commending us both to God, ere he and Steenie went forth with their comrades in arms "that fiery mass of living valour, rolling on the foe," to look death in the face for king and land, name and love and honour, full of glorious hopes and throbbing memories! And then suspense and heavy heart-sick waiting, and mother's prayers and tears floating up to heaven—and then victory. The world's struggle was over—the last great battle fought and won, the mighty spirit whose mad ambition and giant pride had filled the lands with blood and slaughter, tamed and fettered, peace came down on the vexed earth. England's anthems of praise drowned the cry of mourners, and the wail of broken hearts; towns and cities blazed with festal lights, and teemed with exulting crowds—bells rang out joyous peals, the great country's throbbing heart poured itself out in a delirium of joy and triumph—but Frank lay dead on his first and last battle field.

This part of my life is now so like a terrible dream, that my remembrance of it is very

shadowy and confused. I scarcely know how they told me the news; I have a dim vision of Mr. Tremordyn coming to me as I sat alone, looking into my face with his searching eyes, and saying, "Nerve yourself for a great sorrow."

His voice fell on my ear like a death-knell; I would not take my doom from his cold lips. I cried out wildly for Aunt Mary, and read it in her eyes, heard it in her tender, faltering, pitying accents.

Then many days flowed on, I know not how, in a despairing trance, hiding my eyes from the light, shivering, shuddering, in the bright, June weather; an agonized pulse throbbing in my brain, dreary wailings of the wintry wind in my ears. An utter prostration of body and spirit, a nervous horror of the light, of all human sounds, a shrinking even from pity and tenderness, a craving for silence and darkness, and rest that I could not find; a dull carelessness even of the living faces that bent over me, and the kind voices that addressed my ear was

all that I remember clearly of this time. Frank had left me for evermore!

Nought remained of the brave music of the clear ringing voice of the free, manly stride I loved so well, save a perished echo!

They all strove to awaken me to the belief in all love and pity that his death was not certain, that there was hope yet.

“Ensign Langley, missing,” had been the return in the list, but Uncle Edward wrote to his commanding officer, and learnt that the hope was so faint and dim that a breath might extinguish it in darkness. He had been seen to fall just before a charge of the French cavalry swept over the ground, and though a careful search was made for his body after the battle, it was never found.

Perhaps—unspeakable horror!—the poor rent tabernacle of the noble soul was so mangled and defaced from its living beauty, that no man recognised it.

The hope that had flickered faintly for a while went out in darkness, and I strove to

press upon my quivering soul the reality that the strong arm that should have supported and upheld me over the rough ways of life, was cold and nerveless, that the beating pulses of the great, brave, earnest heart were stilled, and that no wild regrets nor passionate prayers could reawaken them, and I could not yet say, "Thy will be done."

Still the days flowed on, and the summer glowed and ripened though the star of my life had set, and there was no light on the horizon, for there is no woe in nature; and all through human grief and heart break, the laughing earth clothes herself with everlasting youth and beauty, puts on the shining garments of the sunlight, and crowns herself with the gladness of the summer, and rejoices in the bird's music and the beauty of the flowers, and the glad rustle of the dreamy air, and the leafy glories of the swaying woods and the song of running waters. Therefore, oh, rebellious heart! stifle thy passionate crying over the dead. "Be still and know that I am God." Look up to the gates of

mourning, and resign thy lost treasures and thy rent heart-strings into the tender hand of Him who knows our frame and remembers we are but dust.

* * * *

It was autumn ere I woke again to an interest in things around me, to be soothed and blessed by the affection that had ever gladdened my life. I remember one bright September morning, when the crimson tints were on the woods, and the sunlight had a mellower lustre, awakening from a doze on the sofa in my room, and seeing Maude sitting by my side working.

"Darling, you have had such a nice sleep," she said, putting back her curls and giving me a loving kiss; "happy dreams there must have been, too, for you smiled so sweetly once or twice. Shall I talk to you, and tell you all the news?"

"Yes, do; it will be a pleasure to listen."

"Well then, first of all, Esther has a little girl: she was born a month ago; but we did not like to tease you then with telling you anything, poor darling. Esther is so happy, and of course

the baby is the most wonderful pet ever seen. Mr. Warrington—was there ever such a ridiculous man!—is quite cross because it's not a boy."

"Very ridiculous indeed, Maudie; I am so glad of this good news. Send all sorts of loving messages from me to Esther when you write. I must begin to embroider something for your new niece: I want work."

"You shall do what you like, and nothing else," Maude said tenderly, putting back my hair with her little puny hand.

"You must not pet me too much, darling: I am still weak and silly," I said, striving to keep back the tears that were rising fast.

"I would scold you all day if that would bring back the colour to your cheeks, and the light to your dear eyes. Oh, Nell! how much happier we were when we were children, and used to scamper on the old rough black pony, Lion, over the fields, and go nutting with poor Steenie and Jem in the dear old times!"

"Oh, Maude! tell me where Steenie is? How

miserably selfish I have been, never to ask before."

A cloud came over her face, and a mist over her blue eyes.

"Oh, Maude! there is no more sorrow? Don't tell me; don't tell me," I cried out in terror, holding up my hands to ward off some imaginary blow.

"No, no, Helen dearest!" She kissed and soothed me lovingly.

"Don't be frightened; Steenie is well and safe, thank God, and coming home very soon. Think of the joy it will be to see his dear handsome face again! But—but—" (Her voice quivered and sunk very low.) "he has lost his right arm."

She hid her face and sobbed.

"Oh, dreadful! that brave, handsome, gallant fellow. Poor, poor Aunt Mary!"

I wept in the silent excess of my sorrow for some time, shrinking wearily from the sunshine, whose glory mocked our grief. At last Maude roused herself and put her arms encouragingly round me.

"Nelly, dearest, you must not cry any more, I am sorry I gave way so foolishly, for we have all made up our minds to be brave and hopeful, and welcome Steenie, dear darling fellow, with bright faces. Even poor mamma can think quietly now, and then we shall all be so proud of him, Nell," and a bright glow lit up her sweet face.

"And think," she went on after a pause, "how grateful we should be that he is spared to come home. And he seems to bear his loss so cheerfully and bravely. Mamma has his first letter written from the hospital at Brussels with his left hand, such queer, scratchy, crooked lines—how we all cried over them—where he talks so bravely and makes so light of his wound, telling us how soon he is coming home to frighten us with his grim looks and empty coat sleeve, and asking if we don't admire his fine handwriting."

"Dear Steenie!"

In spite of my struggles the tears rushed out again here.

“He is in Paris now, resting a little, for I believe he is not strong enough to travel very fast, and Paris is very gay and splendid now, as he writes; but he will be home very soon, we expect him almost daily. I am afraid the first sight of him will be a shock to poor dear mamma, much as she is longing for it. I am sure she dreads it too: you should see how she sits in the evening, listening to every sound, and how a footstep in the avenue, or the sound of wheels on the road, drives every drop of blood from her cheek.”

I could picture it well, could understand the yearning love and trembling fear, and speechless sorrow of the mother's soul.

And he came soon; the noble beloved young soldier, so dreaded and yet so longed for; the darling son and brother. It was but two or three days after, that falling into a doze for weariness one evening on the sofa in the drawing-room, I dreamt that Steenie was come, that I heard the sound of wheels in the avenue, and the hum of arrival, and glad excited welcome,

growing more real and distinct as my dream faded, till I awoke to find it true!

To see Steenie in bodily presence before me and his mother clinging to his neck, her deep passionate sobs filling the room. To see him with bewildered, half-open eyes, scarcely yet knowing whether it was a dream or a reality; clasping Maude and Mary, and wringing Charles's hand over and over again, and terrifying Ned out of his senses by catching him up and smothering him with kisses, and nodding and laughing to Peggy, whose triumphant red face, wet with joyous tears, was hovering about the door.

I shrank aside, feeling strange and half frightened from the glad excitement and joyous bustle, wondering whether this tall, soldierly fellow, in undress uniform, embrowned and martial, though pale from recent illness, with his large moustache, and sun-burnt cheeks, could be the Steenie of the days of yore, who used to be my childish champion and protector, and call me his little wife. But I had short space for wondering.

"Nelly! where's Nelly?" cried Maude's eager voice: "oh! here, behind everybody, quite bewildered, poor dear. Come out, Nelly, and be hugged," dragging me forward. "Look at her Steenie, I do think she's frightened at you."

"And no wonder if she is," said his frank, clear voice, as he gave me a brotherly embrace: "what, this tall young lady little Helen, whom I used to call my little wife—it can't be, and yet it must, and so God bless you, Nelly, for old times' sake. You are not much changed, I should have known your sweet face anywhere, I think. Where's my father?" glancing eagerly round the room.

"He's at the farm, Master Stephen, sir," said Peggy, still hovering about the door like a fascinated bird, and rubbing her cheeks so hard with her apron, in ferment of delight, that they shone like two winter apples: "but I've sent Joe Stevens, (which, it's a providence, was taking his tea in the kitchen), after him, sir, and told him to run every step of the way, which he'll do, there's no fear, for we were most crazed with joy

to see ye safe back again, which most folks will be I guess."

"Well, none can give me a warmer welcome than you can, my dear old nurse; it's like a blessed dream to be at home again amongst you all," looking round the circle of loving, rejoicing faces filling the old familiar room. "I could cry like a child for joy. Only two vacant places, mother dearest; I saw dear Nest in coming through London, and she seems as happy as the day is long, thank God; and looks as handsome as ever. I had hard work to get away from her, and only managed it at last by promising to pay her a long visit very soon. And the other, you can think calmly of him now, mother, can't you—your lost young hero; God rest him!"

She leant her head on his breast, and passed her small, fair hand caressingly over his pale, handsome features, softened by his deep emotion and his late sufferings.

"Just the same, my dear, dear boy, the child I used to love so well—not changed, no, no!"

“A little changed, mother,” he said, in tones that trembled slightly.

The loose cloak he had worn on his journey, and had still kept on over one shoulder, dropped here, accidentally, as I thought, and showed his empty sleeve, fastened to the button of his coat. She shuddered, and hid her face on his shoulder.

“You are a shameful coward, dearest mother; I had a better opinion of your strength of mind than you deserved,” he said, lightly, as he kissed her cheek, “but I did not mean to show you this terrifying object so suddenly. It looks uncomfortable I’m afraid, but it’s the fortune of war”—all his brave light heartedness and gallant spirit shining in his dark, brilliant eye, as he spoke; “and you’ll get used to it in time, and so will Maude and Nell, and curly-pated little Ned, there, who is staring at my sleeve with such grave astonishment. You should have seen Tremordyn’s astounded face, when I jumped out of the Haverford coach this evening, and confronted him.”

I had not noticed before that Mr. Tremordyn

had come in with Steenie, and saw now that Mary was sitting by her husband, with her white hand resting on his arm, as though to draw him into sympathy with their happiness.

“I should have said that nothing in the universe would have startled Tremordyn, but I assure you all, he looked literally appalled when I faced him. He knew me instantly, however, and was the first to give me welcome to the old place.”

“I am so glad, George,” said Mary, looking into her husband’s face, with one of her eloquent glances.

“So was I,” returned Mr. Tremordyn, in his short, quick way, but with wonderful heartiness for him, and for which his wife rewarded him with a bright, grateful smile.

But now came a well-known step in the hall, and a shout of “Steenie, Steenie, lad! where is he?” and Steenie rushed out and we did not see the meeting of the father and son. But we did see their entrance together a moment after. Uncle Edward, in a frantic state of joy and be-

wilderment, wringing Steenie by the hand, till we thought he must infallibly drag his arm off, holding him out at arm's length, and swearing it was an imposition, a humbug—that this great soldierly fellow couldn't be little Steenie, then hugging him again, and clapping him on the shoulder, and shouting to Peggy to bring out all the eatables she had in the house for the lad must be starved, and finally in a state of exhaustion, throwing himself into his great arm chair and exclaiming that he was an old fool, and he knew it, but that he was nearly out of his wits with joy, and that, clasping his hands reverently, he thanked God with all his heart.

What need to dwell on that long happy evening, bright with the magic of re-united affections and tender household mirth, and hallowed with the holy influence of deep and wordless gratitude—how the mother sat by her recovered boy, holding his hand close, in a still and silent ecstasy of heart-happiness, and we all grouped about him, listened as in a dream to his familiar voice, talking over old times, and telling us

stories of his soldier's life, and its stirring scenes.

Out from the land of shadows, from thy dark and silent kingdom, oh remorseless Time! comes its bright memory, clear and unfaded. And then, when it was very late, we all knelt in prayer together, and sent up united the throbbing gratitude of our full hearts to the courts of Heaven; and then as they still lingered, unwilling to break the charm that rested on them, I stole away silently to my own room, and after a little quiet crying that I might not stop, prayed, looking out on the stillness and the stars of the eternal heavens, that God would bless them all, and then slept more calmly than I had done since Frank died.

CHAPTER XII.

It was wonderfully strange and pleasant to hear Steenie's cheerful whistle as I came down stairs next morning, and pleasanter still to see his handsome familiar face, and meet his frank smile and brotherly greeting, as I entered the breakfast room.

"You look pale, Nell, you and I must have some of our old rides again to bring back your colour."

He laid his hand kindly on my shoulder, and gave me such a tender compassionate glance from his handsome eyes, that the tears started involuntarily.

"You have the same good, sweet face as you always had, Nell, when I was a wild lad and

you a little quiet demure mouse of a girl, in the old bright days before we knew what sorrow meant. We have both learnt the lesson since, Helen."

I felt his meaning in its fullest and most sorrowful sense, oh! how keenly.

"I saw her again in Paris," he said in a low tone (there was no need to utter the name he meant,) "she drove past me once in the Bois de Boulogne with him, and I think she saw me. That villain's injury had not been a severe one. Poor Frank's ball only caused a simple fracture, and he recovered wonderfully quick. Paris, in possession of the allies, and under the restoration of the monarchy, is a vortex of gay life and luxurious dissipation, which I had neither strength nor spirits to enjoy, and she is there." He paused, and then went on, in a voice that shook with the strong emotion of his honest heart. "If I could but have saved her, if she would have but listened to me and left the wretch who would force her to ruin of body and soul, I would have defended her with my

life. After the duel, when my wound prevented my seeking her out myself, I wrote to her, speaking in the most moving way I could of the sorrow and affliction she had brought on all who loved her, warning her of the irretrievable ruin, the black future that lay before her, and beseeching her, for the love of old days, to listen to me, to consent to see me, if only for a moment. I sent the letter by a trustworthy messenger, but I never received an answer. Perhaps she never got it, and I longed and waited for her reply till hope died within me, and the whole earth looked dark and desolate. And yet how beautiful she was, and that beauty is to be crushed and darkened by shame and despair, such a vision of unearthly loveliness she always was to my boyish eyes, and—God help and pity her—how I loved her.”

His brave voice sunk, he rested his arm on the chimney piece and his head on it, while a strong shiver convulsed his whole frame, and one deep, strong sob escaped him.

What could I do for such sorrow as this?

What, but lay my hand tenderly on his shoulder and entreat him, with half frightened earnestness, to be comforted.

“You are right, Nell,” he said, looking up with the bright smile of other years, “as you always were, my dear sister. Your very voice has a cool quiet refreshing sound, like the ripple of a still stream, and I must remember that I am a soldier, with the dint of battle and marks of the hot strife upon me,” with a glance at his right sleeve, “and therefore must look Fate bravely in the face, and bide her buffets courageously. We have both suffered keenly, Nell, as your pale cheeks and sad eyes tell me plain enough, though the beloved of your soul,—brave noble fellow that he was, and worthy a woman’s love like yours—met a gallant soldier’s fate, on a victorious field—don’t shudder, dear Nell—and I have lost mine by a living death of shame. But enough of all this; I ought to cheer and strengthen you instead of making you worse, and here comes Maude, as fresh as the morning to cheer us both.”

And Maude ran in, bright and clear as the

September sunshine, with a little basket of freshly gathered flowers in her hand, which she placed in the centre of the breakfast table, and taking out a half blown rose, glittering with dew-drops, danced up to her brother, and, after kissing him to her heart's content, ended by placing it in his button-hole.

"There, now you are a perfect Adonis," said she, shaking back her curls, and looking up at him with her joyous blue eyes.

"And you are as much a wild rose as ever—here's a forest of mad curls," gathering them up in his hand. "Is there any more sober sense in this little head than there used to be six years ago? Maude, I expected to see you married and settled by this time; you are positively growing fat and aged."

"Fat, indeed! I am no fatter than Jessie Macdonald, your old favourite in days of yore. She has grown fatter in these years, let me tell you, Captain Brotherton."

"Ah, poor little Jessie, how is she, and I have a tender recollection of the fun we used to have

together. She is entwined so closely with all the dear old times. I shall walk down after breakfast, and see her, and that dear old worthy Scotch soul of a mother. Do you think that I should frighten them?"

"You will not see Jessie; she nearly fainted at the very notion of it. Poor little dear, you should have seen how she cried and sobbed and trembled when we told her about you, and how Mrs. Macdonald scolded her for 'makin' a fule o' hersel' aboot a callant she hadna set her een on for five years and mair.' I really thought the old lady rather cross that day. Ah, Steenie, I'm afraid you made a wee hole in poor Jessie's little heart, and never stopped to mend it, like a faithless knight as you were."

Steenie looked grave for a moment, and then laughed merrily. "Well, Maudie, if it were so, which I don't believe, the sight of this unoccupied sleeve of mine will do more to mend the hole than any other specific I know of. But is nobody coming to breakfast to-day? Yes, here is my mother, heaven bless her. I would have

given a good deal for a look of that face of hers a few weeks ago," and he hurried to meet her.

We all saw that she kept her eyes on the ground, and answered his affectionate greeting without raising them; but on his saying jestingly, yet lovingly, "come, mother, be courageous and look up, one glance, and it's all over," she slowly lifted her eyes and let them rest for a moment on the sight she dreaded, and then the colour faded from her cheek, and bursting into tears, she hurried from the room.

Steenie looked self-reproachful and sad, and Maude and I exchanged frightened looks, but we were greatly relieved when she returned quickly, with her calm brow and bright smile, and took her place at the table with her usual unruffled sweetness of manner.

Uncle Edward now making his appearance, with his usual cheery shout of "well, boys and girls," in itself an echo of old times, and clapping Steenie on the shoulder, and vowing he looked better than he ever did in his life, announced that he was as hungry as a hunter, and

we all sat down to breakfast on the substantials of which he commenced a gallant attack.

Steenie said he had been out already to the farm, and through the village, to hunt up all his old acquaintances.

"Didn't all the boys follow you with admiring glances?" asked Maude laughing. "Peggy tells me they had a bon-fire on the common last night in honour of the young captain's return. Papa must positively give a dinner to his tenants, Steenie, and you must make a speech."

"Unluckily, I am a terrible bad hand at speechifying; besides, it would be rather a ludicrous proceeding, Maude."

"Not a bit; you must expect to be made a lion of. I shall lose no opportunity of showing you off, I promise you," said Maude, with a serious face that set us all laughing.

"Well, they were all heartily glad to see me, the poor simple honest folks; especially old Burrowes—poor fellow, he has never got over the loss of his son Tom at Toulouse."

Aunt Mary lookod down, and a shadow came over her face.

“Besides, I visited Dame Betsey (that old woman must be a hundred at least) who nearly fainted when I walked into the shop, endeared by the remembrances of innumerable lots of hard bake, and other juvenile weaknesses. I must beat up the Macdonalds and Leesons after breakfast, and bye-and-bye, Nell and Maudie, we’ll ride over to the town and astound the Haverfordites. Dear old place! I could have hugged everyone I met last night, man, woman, and child. I see Nell gives an enquiring glance at the place where my right arm used to be, and wonders how I propose managing my horse, but I have grown wonderfully expert in holding whip and bridle in my left hand, and shall astonish her bye-and-bye. Give me another cup of tea, mother dear, there is no such tea as yours in Belgium, nor the whole world over. And so Bella Leeson is married?”

“Yes; to Mr. MacAllaster, the merchant at Haverford. She is quite a great lady now, gives

the gayest parties in the town, and fears we must find living in the country very dull."

"Capital. How well I remember her simpers, her blue eyes, her Italian songs, and all her pretty affectations. And is Kate married?"

"No; faith!" said Uncle Edward, finishing his last egg. "Katie's ready for you, lad, if you'll have her. She must be getting on now, that lassie."

"Whether she'll have me or not, is a more important consideration. But Kate Leeson never can be destined to be an old maid, with that laugh and those eyes of hers. I wonder if Bella will faint when she sees me?"

"There's no knowing, I wouldn't come suddenly upon her, lad. You'd better send Katie before to pave the way; you'll be sure to find her there, for she almost lives with her sister now."

We had scarcely ever lingered so long over the breakfast table before as we did that bright morning, talking of old times and old faces. Steenie was the first to start up, saying that he

must go and hunt up the old doctor and the Macdonald's, and I watched his quick, firm tread and gallant bearing, till the trees hid him from my sight, and wondered sadly if Nora yet wept remorsefully for the noble heart she had so cruelly wronged.

He returned a little before lunch, and said that Mrs. Macdonald was overjoyed at the sight of him, and had given him a most hearty, motherly welcome, "nearly going into hysterics for sheer delight;" but that Jessie had run to her room and locked herself in, and that no persuasions, nor entreaties, nor scoldings from her mother, who was greatly scandalized at her unreasonable behaviour, could draw her forth, nor elicit any other reply but sobs.

Mrs. Macdonald was extremely wroth. "We maun just leave her to hersel, Captain (she would call me Captain in spite of my protestations), she's but a puir silly tawpie, but I meen she'll be ashamed o' sich a clamjamfrie when you're gane, and she'll hae come to her senses. The bairn's daft, and ye maun just forgie her."

“This I very readily promised,” said Stephen, “and came away, after interceding with Mrs. Macdonald not to scold Jessie very much after I was gone. I asked them here this evening, mother dear, and the old lady promised to bring her daughter if it was in the power of woman to accomplish it. Poor little Jessie! I am not sure, but that I think her shutting herself up, and her sobs, and her trembling, a rather more flattering and honest reception than if she had come out and given me a clamorous welcome.”

“Well, I hope you mean to reward her for it as she deserves,” said Aunt Mary with a smile that had considerable meaning in it.

Steenie laughed and changed the subject very quickly.

It was such a bright delicious afternoon that we were all ready for our ride into Haverford; and the rapid motion through the soft sunshine and fragrant air, with the golden harvest fields and the mellow wood-lands, rich with the wealth of fruitful autumn, stretching all round us, seemed to re-awaken in my saddened heart

something like a glow of renewed life and hope.

Our mission at Haverford was to shake hands with everybody as Steenie said, one not easily fulfilled, for he had so many friends, and was so overwhelmed with welcomes, hand-shakings, congratulations, and invitations, people rushing out of shops, and shouting from windows to greet him, while so many old acquaintances of all ages and conditions kept starting up at every step our horses took, that we grew fairly bewildered, and began seriously to fear that we should not get home till midnight. Of course, Mrs. Selwyn, as one of our oldest friends, had to be called on, who received Steenie with open arms, and almost overpowered him with kindness, getting at last extremely indignant at our refusing to stay to dinner in our riding garments. Then when we had escaped from her, there was Mrs. MacAllaster, who, in her surprise, and pleasure, and sorrow at seeing her old play-fellow, quite forgot to be patronising, and gave him a very kind, half laughing, half crying

welcome, which made her look extremely pretty and natural. And Kate, in her hearty reception of him, with a smile on her roguish mouth and tears in her black eyes, was not the less bewitching.

It was a long visit here, and by the time it was over, and our few commissions executed, and a dozen more friendly greetings disposed of and engagements accepted, it was evening, and quite time to ride home again, Steenie, who really began to look very tired, declaring that it was all very delightful and that he had no idea people cared so much about him, but that he had had almost enough of friends for one day, and that his unfortunate remaining arm ached so terribly from the shaking that he had undergone, that he could scarcely hold the bridle; and proposing that we should set spurs to our horses and flee for our lives.

So we rode merrily home through the woods and fields, still and hushed in the clear September evening.

It was pretty to see the sisterly pride Maude

took in her handsome soldier brother, the delight she had in holding his arm when we walked in Haverford from one house to another, and with what a bright glow on her pretty face she met the glances of involuntary interest from passers by, and the congratulations and welcomes of old acquaintances—as pretty as was her childlike indignation before we started that he would not wear his Waterloo medal in the streets.

We discovered when we reached home that Steenie had found time, while Maude and I were in the Haverford library to rush into a jeweller's shop, and buy presents for us all, which he produced in the drawing-room, amid great admiration and a large amount of kisses. Maude's and mine were two very beautiful little pearl crosses, for the neck, and there was another like them for Mary, whom we sent for immediately, on important business, as Maude added to the message. Charles's was a very handsome ring, which called forth a great deal of bantering about his small, white hand. Uncle Edward's a gold snuff box; Aunt Mary's a bracelet, with a space for hair in

the clasp, which Steenie told her, laughingly, he meant to fill up with a lock of his own; and lastly, Mrs. Macdonald's was an immense brooch of Scotch pebbles (as was appropriate), set in gold, and nearly as large as a cheese plate, which she affixed with much satisfaction, to the stomacher of her black silk gown, and declared "was the bonniest thing she had seen for many a lang year, and minded her o' ane that Bailie Macdonald—who's now in a better place—gave her lang syne, and which was stolen from her in that weary London, foul fa' the smutty face o't."

Peggy was not forgotten, for Steenie said he had ordered a wonderful crimson shawl for her, in which she would look like the queen of peonies, and turn the heads of all Melchisedech Howlett's congregation. And then he let fall by accident a tiny box which came open, and from which rolled out a very pretty ring of blue turquoises, which he hastily picked up, with a very heightened colour, and hurried into his pocket, and which Maude whispered to me, she was sure was for Jessie.

“And where was Jessie?” everybody enquired, and Mrs. Macdonald, with a lugubrious shake of the head, lamented that all her maternal remonstrances had been unavailing to bring Jessie to a sense of propriety, or to make her leave off crying, and come to see Captain Brotherton like a Christian lassie should do; “that the bairn was gane daft, and there was na help for’t.”

Mrs. Macdonald herself, good soul, had been seated in the drawing room for the last hour, in her best silk gown and company cap, with her usual pile of knitting before her, laudably pursuing her usual somewhat ungrateful task of entertaining Charles, who was lying on the sofa, looking very pale and weary, and pressing every now and then his hand to his forehead, but declaring himself very well.

Steenie looked vexed, and fidgetted restlessly about the room.

“Won’t Jessie really come, Mrs. Macdonald?” said he.

“Indeed; and I’m muckle afraid that she will no’, fule bairn that she is.”

Steenie went up to his mother, who was sitting down to make the tea, and whispered her to wait a little.

"Go after her, Steenie," said Charles, who saw the movement.

"Do you think she would come?" Steenie said, catching eagerly at the idea: "I'll run directly. Nell, will you come with me? never mind your habit, she'll see you, and then we'll capture her safely—come along;" and in spite of Aunt Mary begging that he would rest himself a little first, and Mrs. Macdonald entreating that "he wouldna' fash himself, but e'en let the silly lassie tak' her ain gait," Steenie was off, hurrying me along with him, and scarcely stopping to breathe till running through the copse, and down the lane, and across the church-yard, we reached Mrs. Macdonald's porch; when, nearly exhausted, he leant against the door, and laughed at our breathless condition, and my disordered riding guise. But Jessie must have heard the laugh, for when we mounted to the little drawing room we found it deserted, and

when leaving Steenie to wait there in the thickening twilight, I ran up to Jessie's bedroom; found the door locked, and knew by the quivering, frightened sounds—half-sigh, half-sob, that I caught by listening at the key-hole, that Jessie was within, and crying very much.

“Open the door, Jessie, you silly little thing; it is only me—Helen. Do open it Jessie, dear, I want so much to speak to you.” But my utmost eloquence could not persuade Jessie to unlock the door for several minutes; and it was only after solemn asseverations on my part that Stephen was not close behind me, that she did unlock it—very slowly, and with trembling fingers, and then hiding her blue eyes and tear-stained face on my bosom, asked falteringly and tearfully, if he was much changed; if—if it was very dreadful.

“He is changed, of course, Jessie; grown from a boy into a man, and very sunburnt and soldierly. Remember what a time it is; but he is as handsome as ever; and as for his arm, it was very terrible at first to all of us, but we

shall all get used to it, and he bears it so bravely Jessie, and is just as merry and warm-hearted as of old." And here Jessie began to sob again. "He is such a brave, noble fellow, and he is so anxious to see you, that it is unkind to treat him in this way, if only for old times' sake; besides Jessie you will make him think that he is an object of horror to you, and you would not wish that, surely? You could not have cared much about him if only the loss of his arm—" I had touched the right chord now in Jessie's little tender heart.

"Oh! no, no, it is not that—indeed, indeed; but I am so silly, and I can't bear to think of it," and her voice died in her choking tears.

"I know it is not that, Jessie, dear; but now calm yourself, and be reasonable for your own sake, and his too. We have come on purpose to fetch you, and tea was ready when we left home, and Steenie was in such a hurry; he wouldn't even let me change my habit, and he's waiting down stairs all this time. Do come, bathe your eyes, and smoothe your hair, and come down

stairs like a good sensible girl—like a woman, dear Jessie.”

She was such a little simple childish creature, that though two or three years older than I, it seemed quite natural to speak to her in the protecting fashion one does to a child. Yes, she would come down and try to act rightly and sensibly; she was ashamed of being so foolish; and so, slowly and tremblingly she proceeded to bathe her face and arrange her glossy brown curls, and array herself, with my aid, in her prettiest muslin dress, and then with much nervous shivering and holding my hand very tight, to creep down-stairs in the dusk of the autumn evening.

“I am so glad it is dark; there is no candle is there?” She faltered in a trembling whisper as we reached the drawing-room door, and saw in the thick twilight the dim outline of Steenie’s figure, as he stood patiently waiting by the window.

“No, there’s no light. Now, courage, Jessie dear,” and giving her a little friendly push, I stayed to watch her entrance.

Poor little Jessie! It was a touching picture enough to see her little slight, childish figure moving so slowly and fearfully through the shadowy room, with such a noiseless tread that the object at once of her love and terror did not even hear it; and to listen to the little trembling voice that said so faintly, "Captain Brotherton," and startled him from his dream; and more touching still when, forgetful of the remorseless years and their dreary changes, of everything but the olden times and the beloved memories, she sobbed so sorrowfully and yet so happily upon his shoulder; and he, drawing his arm round her, comforted her with all the kind encouraging words his brave, tender heart could suggest. Peace to thy innocent dreams, and thy loving, throbbing woman's heart, little Jessie, weeping there on his breast such tears of childlike sorrow and delicious joy.

"You must not cry so, Jessie, dear Jessie," Steenie faltered, "you grieve me so terribly, I hoped for a brighter welcome—and—why should we meet in the dark? I cannot see that sweet,

familiar face of yours," drawing her closer to the window that the light of the red harvest moon whose rim just fired the horizon, might fall on her features; "it is a most ghostlike meeting, Jessie, but perhaps you are not so anxious to see me, grievously changed as I am?"

"Oh! yes, indeed, Captain Brotherton," trembled on Jessie's lips.

"Tut! who is Captain Brotherton, Jessie? my sweet, little childish friend, we were like brother and sister in the old bright times, ere sorrow had touched us. You are the same, Jessie, but I am altered since then. I went away a careless, light-hearted boy, full of hope and longings, and I have come back a maimed soldier, with the shadow of a great sorrow on me."

What made him say that—what need was there?

"I like to fancy you, unchanged, dear little simple, true-hearted woman, as you always were. You are fresh and pure as ever, no black cloud has darkened your calm sky—so I must be Steenie still, Jessie, as in the old days. He is

the thoughtless lad, the old merry, childish companion of your sweet remembrances. Captain Brotherton is the weary, wounded soldier, with a worn frame and a heavy heart."

She gave a long, quivering sigh that reached me as I stood in the shadowy background of the little room, through which the broad, harvest moon began to cast long gleams of trembling light.

"But come, Jessie, I scolded you for giving me a sorrowful welcome, and I am growing as bad myself. They must be positively famished at home, for tea was ready when Nell and I left, and my father must be ferocious. So, Nell, darling, fetch Jessie's bonnet and shawl for her and let us be off."

But Jessie insisted on running for it herself, and we set out through the rich, harvest moonlight, and the soft fragrant air, through the village street and across the church-yard, the very path where Frank and I, on just such another moonlight evening, had gone, step by step, when he told me of the love that was now

a dim and faded vision, and uttered the passionate words now cold, lifeless echoes; and were we had lingered so late entranced by the delicious glory of the moon, and the night and the bright magic of our first young golden dream!

But we were at home soon, and the light and the warmth, and the welcome, stifled for awhile the crushing memory.

How well I remember Uncle Edward's pretence of ferocious indignation at being kept so long waiting for his tea, and how, after firing an impatient broadside all round at everybody, he relented, and kissing Jessie gruffly swore that for all she was such a little fool, he was glad to see that silly little face of hers; and how she got so tenderly kissed and welcomed by Aunt Mary, and Maude, and Mary the younger, who was there, with her calm smile and sweet eyes, and with Steenie's present on her white neck, and what a long, earnest, trembling look did Jessie turn upon Steenie, as he stood revealed in the bright lamp-light that filled the room, and how bravely she

bore the sight of that dreadful empty sleeve, only turning from it with slightly swimming eyes, and a very little, hardly-perceptible shudder of womanly love and pity.

Also how Mrs. Macdonald was proceeding gravely to lecture her daughter on the sinfulness of her behaviour, and the muckle fash she had caused to everybody, but was stopped by our united intercessions, and persuaded into forgiving Jessie on her repentance of her errors, and confessing that "she was a douce bairn enough, to spake the haill truth, for a' her fykes and fancies."

By this time I was reminded by Charles asking me how long I meant to retain that graceful Amazonian costume, that I was still in my riding habit, and laughing at my forgetfulness, hurried upstairs to change it, followed presently by Jessie, in a perfect whirl of delight, to show me the blue turquoise ring that Steenie had found an opportunity of putting on her little finger, in their walk from Mrs. Macdonald's, and to clasp me round the neck, and tell me how happy she was,

and how she thought Steenie handsomer than ever, and to pour out all the restless delight of her little fluttering heart.

I could not tell her—it would have been cruel—the shadowy fear would haunt me, in spite of myself, that the glad hopes and delicious fancies that danced in her blue eyes and shone on her bright cheek, had no other foundation than the sand.

Our long deferred tea was one of the merriest gatherings the old house had known for a long time, at which Uncle Edward was so irresistibly funny, and said so many droll things, that I thought Steenie and Jessie particularly would never have done laughing. Then after tea we had the music, and the talk of old times, and Jessie, at Steenie's entreaty, sang all the pretty Scotch songs he used to like; and he stood beside her the while, and they talked in low voices by the window near the piano, with the moonlight falling tenderly on them; and so the evening slipped away in the old familiar, happy fashion of days long gone by.

And they were very happy, thank God, I thought, looking out from my own room on the tender beauty and solemn glory of the quiet night; and might not I be happy to in another way, with my memories of the lost, and my hope to meet Frank in Heaven. But I could not think that yet, and moon and stars were blotted out by the rush of earthly sorrow.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALL kinds of neighbourly festivities followed Steenie's return, and no end of dinner-parties and dances were got up in his honour, till he declared popularity the most wearying thing on earth, and professed serious intentions of going off to London to stay with Esther, till deterred therefrom by Jessie's sorrowful blue eyes, and his mother and sisters' indignation at the mention of his leaving home again so soon. They had not made half enough of him yet.

Dear Aunt Mary! it was a moving sight to see her on the first Sunday after Steenie's return walking to the old church, leaning on the arm of her young, handsome, wounded hero, with such a glow of motherly pride, and love, and sorrow in

her calm face, and speaking eyes; meeting so gratefully and proudly the kindly, half bashful greetings and glances of gruff affectionate interest, from the simple country folks to the Master Steenie of their old remembrances, which he returned in the sweet voice, and frank, hearty manner they all knew and loved so well.

And little Jessie—that first month after his return was to her one long, happy, tender, fluttering dream. She was nearly always with us, and their walks and rides together were of almost daily occurrence, and thought I do not think—indeed, she confessed so much to me—that he ever plainly told her he loved her, or that there was anything more than a brother's kindness in his manner, it seemed enough to satisfy all the nameless unacknowledged yearnings of her soul.

The turquoise ring that he had given her glittered on her finger, and he was so kind, so affectionate, so fond of talking of old times and happy recollections—that, what more could Jessie want?

Still he never spoke to her of the future, he dwelt only on the past; and sometimes I fancied a half-remorseful shadow passed across his handsome features, and saddened his dark eyes, and that his voice when he spoke to her had a self-upbraiding sound.

The golden September time faded into a grey October, and the breezy afternoon rides, and rambles through the crimson tinted autumn woods, and the moonlit evening walks seemed at an end; and Steenie went on a week's visit to an old schoolfellow in a neighbouring county, and Jessie grew dull and moping, and listless, and the sunshine of the house and the season seemed to have departed with him. Even Maude's inexhaustible spirits seemed to languish, and Charles had taken to shutting himself up in his room more than ever, so that his appearance in the drawing-room was a rare occurrence, while the setting in of the dull rainy weather brought him such a continuance of head-ache that any exertion was painful and wearisome to him.

There was no comfort in the skies now. I

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have turned with a shudder from grey, dull, trailing masses of vapour, like mourning banners of the powers of the air, shut my ears with a shiver against the wailings of the October wind, like the sighing of souls in pain. The glory and sparkle of the summer had gone like my dead hopes, and the crying wind mocked me, the darkening night heavy with rain and dank with mist, had no pity for me.

Thus it was with me one dark evening, when the air was thick with fog, and there was no light in heaven, and I sat alone ere the lamp was lit, gazing at the phantoms in the fire, when Mr. Tremordyn came in.

He took no notice of my half inaudible greeting, and placing himself on the rug before me, with his back to the fire, looked down upon me from his lofty pedestal with a very little pity, and a great deal of contempt.

“Still mourning over the past?” he said, “vainest and most unprofitable of all earthly regrets.”

I felt I did not want his cold philosophy; it

jarred upon me just then—one tender word or gentle touch would have availed more than volumes of it; so I said nothing, but let a moaning gust of wind that sighed down the broad chimney, and rattled the window frames, answer for me.

“The wind enforces my creed,” Mr. Tremordyn resumed, with his cold smile; “he has sung the same song for ages, and will sing it till time shall be no more—sighing it softly in summer, wailing shrilly in winter—how all things pass away. He is a great teacher, Helen.”

“And a mournful one; his lessons bring no strength, only desponding and vague fears.”

“True, you must seek strength elsewhere. Why is it—can you tell me—that when we know, or profess to know, that ‘we dwell in houses of clay that are crushed before the moth;’ that ‘man fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not?’ familiar words from our childhood—words that we quote and profess to believe, that yet when earthly supports, things frail and inefficient, like

ourselves, round which we have twisted our heart-strings, under some wild incurable delusion, common to the whole human race, are suddenly plucked from our arms, such utter and desperate sorrow falls upon us, such darkness clothes the whole earth; such fruitless cries and wails insult the Majesty of God. Why is this?"

"It is the weakness that is born in us, that clings to our frail bodies and earth-loving spirits. As long as we are flesh—until this 'mortal shall have put on immortality,' we must bleed, and faint, and cry out when the love of our souls, the prop and guide of our failing feet is rent from us."

"Ay, and yet it is strange!" he said, musingly, his dark, keen eyes bent on the ground, as though by piercing it he should discern the mystery. "Why mourn so passionately for the dead, whose destiny so far exceeds ours—as heaven does earth? Why cry out, and wail, and rend ourselves for them who have won the fruition of glory, after which we all profess to be striving?" A glow came into his pale

cheek, and his eye kindled as he spoke. "The root of sorrow is selfishness—we cannot bear to lose our idol that we have wrapped in our arms and carried in our bosom, and kept the winds from visiting too roughly; and fallen down and worshipped, and hung the offerings of our hearts upon, forgetting it was frail, perishable clay, like ourselves; and when we find it is human, and the great reaper mows it down with his resistless scythe, as he does the flowers of all the earth, and we stand alone, why does such startled dismay and despair seize upon our souls? We know it must die."

"Who can realise that hard truth of the thing it loves?" I said, shrinking wearily from his cold remorseless talk, "is sorrow for the dead no part of your creed?"

"Nay, it is part of human nature, and cannot be shut out," he answered, turning his handsome marble face upon me; "but such sorrow for the dead as enervates, and fetters, and cramps the energies of your soul, and the powers of life, darkens the heavens above your head, hangs

the earth with sackcloth, and strews your path with ashes, is a weak, cowardly thing, a miserable, worthless guest, that should be driven forth from every strong, earnest heart, that feels life to be a battle, that needs all our unimpaired strength, all our undimmed powers of watchfulness. You have lost your idol, it has shattered at your feet" (I don't even think he saw I was weeping), "nerve yourself to look calmly upon it, and say—It is well. Perhaps it stood between God and you, intercepted the love, the worship that should have been His alone, chained down all your faculties, imprisoned all your energies to one all-absorbing passion, unfitted you totally for the struggle of life, paralysed your powers for the great warfare that lies before every son and daughter of humanity. Well, it is gone—reft from you, lay it to rest, fold about it the shadowy garments of the past, and walk on, straight and unflinching; you know not what lies before you, how many far darker and more deadly evils that the fading away of your girlish hopes and fancies may be waiting in ambush for you, bidding

only the time to sweep down upon your path with mighty force. You know not how many powers of the air are leagued together against you, so strengthen your heart and walk on warily, and," a glow as of triumphant anticipation lit up his deep dark eyes and pale clear-cut features, "when the struggle is over, and you stand at your Master's door, waiting to be crowned, what will all these lost dreams of youth seem to you then? Nothing, and less than nothing."

He ceased, and I looked at him, standing firm, erect, and motionless in the red fire light, in breathless silence, mingled with a sort of awe. I admired and envied him, and felt that his creed, hard and relentless as it seemed to my sore heart, was a true and noble one. So might you regard the persecuted martyrs of olden times with reverential awe, whose high example you could never hope to follow.

And yet I feared him, for his strength could have no sympathy with my weakness, his unfaltering resolute nature could only regard my

vague fears, and sorrowful dreams, and cowardly misgivings with contempt.

And then I wondered, half sorrowfully, if Mary was happy, (strange to say, I never thought of her and her winning goodness and beauty, without a touch of sadness), and whether she had not sighed over the wreck of her young dreams; whether two natures, so widely different in thought, temperament, and purpose, could walk happily together through the crooked ways of life.

He should have lived in the dark old days, I thought, when God's servants "wandered in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth, destitute, afflicted, tormented;" or he should have been a missionary to some distant region of the earth, warring with his master's enemies, as the old Covenanters were wont to do, the sword in one hand and the Bible in the other.

Long before I had done speculating vaguely about him, he had taken his hat, and wishing me an abrupt good-night, walked off through the

rushing rain and wind of the dark October night, taking, as I fancied, a strange pleasure in buffeting them, and leaving me to listen to the dirge, as he thought it, of the sweeping gusts over the perishing things of earth, till Uncle Edward strode in, clamouring for lights and tea, and demanding how I dared to sit moping by myself, set to work to drive away as fast as he might all my gloomy fancies by his kind, affectionate heartiness.

And then Maude came dancing in with a letter that Joe had just brought from the post-office at Haverford, from Steenie, saying he would be home to-morrow; and then further announcing, with great glee, that Mrs. Selwyn was going to give a large dance—really a grand affair—and that Jessie and she had settled to be dressed alike, in white silk dresses, looped up with pink rosebuds, with ditto in their hair—a fact which made Uncle Edward stare, open-mouthed, with most amusing incredulity and amazement—and that I must positively go, and wear the same.

Steenie came home the next day to all our

great joy, his arrival brightening the dark, rainy evening like a rush of sunlight, and raising the whole house, and more especially Jessie, into brilliant spirits.

Mrs. Selwyn's forthcoming festivity furnished the chief topic of conversation during the week. Jessie was to come to our house to dress, and go under the chaperonage of Aunt Mary, and she and Maude were to be dressed alike. Steenie was to wear his uniform, as the party was chiefly given in his honour, and everything promised brilliantly.

Young Selwyn's regiment had also been at Waterloo, but as he had returned home in an ingloriously whole condition, as Steenie observed, he was not half such a lion as he was, and the sensation that he (Selwyn) excited among the young ladies of the neighbourhood was quite paltry and insignificant, compared to that caused by himself.

Why everybody determined in their own minds that I must go to this party I cannot conceive; but so they did, and all my sincere

dismay and distress would not hinder their persuasions and entreaties. Maude besought me so prettily to go and be dressed like her, which seemed the height of her earthly desires.—Aunt Mary wished me to go, so did Charles, who very seldom took any interest in anything pertaining to balls or ball-goers.—Uncle Edward pished and pshawed, and stormed at my obstinacy, but I think I should have resisted it all, for the idea of pleasure seemed a painful outrage to my memories of the lost, had it not been for Steenie, who on the very day of the party brought me a beautiful bouquet of flowers, like those he had given to Jessie and Maude, and entreated me so kindly in his tender, brotherly, half-boyish way, to go with them, not to deny him the pleasure of taking me, one of the dearest of his sisters, that, from want of knowing how to refuse, I burst into tears, and with a strange pang of shame and self-humiliation consented to go, and he, after soothing me in his honest, affectionate way, ran off to announce his victory to Maude and Jessie.

If the part of my story I have just passed is like a bewildered dream, this is clear and distinct enough. Every word, every minute incident is indelibly stamped on my brain, as though graven in a rock with a pen of iron.

We came down into the drawing room dressed before our departure, Maude, Jessie, and I in the white silk and pink roses that had so excited Uncle Edward's incredulous amazement, and followed by Peggy, who looked upon us as three triumphs of art and industry, produced by her labours, and who, after describing a circuit round each of us, and bestowing the last finishing touches, rubbed her hands with sober exultation and pronouncing that she'd lay any man or woman a silver sixpence that we was three as pretty wenches as you'd meet on a summer's day, retired towards the door, to be ready to announce the arrival of the carriage, from which post she surveyed us with placid satisfaction.

Steenie was standing before the glass, looking at himself in his uniform, arranging an obstinate stiff collar that wouldn't set as he wanted it,

muttering somewhat petulantly that after all a man did miss his right hand confoundedly.

"Jessie," said he, jestingly, "if ever you make up your mind to have me, you must be my right hand, literally and figuratively—remember that."

We all laughed, and Jessie blushed and smiled in the prettiest way imaginable, her blue eyes saying, as plainly as eyes could speak, that she desired nothing better than to be his right hand, just as those same eyes had expressed a moment before, in their wistful wonder and admiration, that Steenie, in his scarlet coat and epaulettes, was the most glorious young hero they had ever beheld.

"Isn't the carriage come? we shall be late; and where's my mother?" said Steenie: "hang this collar, and the rascal who made it, and the French bullet that shattered my right arm, more especially: don't turn pale, Jessie. It's my opinion a man looks a fool in a red coat, don't you think so, Jessie? Why did you wear pink roses in your hair? they won't look well against

my scarlet jacket, and of course you will dance every dance with me. Moreover, you must be charitable enough to button my glove for me with your little white fingers; here's a state to be reduced to," and so he rattled on, half amused, I think, at Jessie's wistful gaze of simple, undisguised admiration.

She looked extremely pretty, her small, slight, childish figure had something almost fairy-like in the floating drapery of her white silken robes, and the roses that nestled amidst her warm, brown, glossy locks, might have been the crown of some woodland nymph, with the innocent face and the earnest blue eyes, that had lately worn, I thought, a half appealing look.

Here Aunt Mary came in, dressed, and the carriage being announced, we set forth, and arrived in due time at the scene of festivity. I believe it was a very pleasant evening, with all indispensables of good music, well-lit rooms, pretty girls, plenty of red coats, and a hospitable, kindly, warm-hearted hostess.

Steenie certainly looked handsome enough to

please the most capricious of coquettes, far less little, blushing, loving Jessie, whose face of enviable happiness I was admiring the whole evening. He was unquestionably the lion of the evening, admired and petted by sympathising young ladies, to an extent that must have driven all his other unwounded and comparatively neglected comrades half wild with wrath and jealousy. Even the haughty Miss Crawfords, the acknowledged belles of the county (the two elder ones were married, and two younger sisters filled their places and assumed their privileges, Lady Crawford giving the public to understand that the female portion of her family had been county belles from time immemorial, and that the distinction belonged exclusively to them by right of succession, which nobody had the audacity to dispute), even these queenly damsels, who went to London every season, and had a house in Grosvenor Square, and who usually regarded Uncle Edward as little better than a farmer, shared the general enthusiasm, and lavished their softest airs and most bewitching

smiles on Steenie's fortunate head. And our hero bore his share of public favour with his usual frank joyous good humour, not at all oblivious, as I was glad to see, in the midst of his luck of Jessie's wistful eyes and sweet appealing face, but dancing more with her than any one else, so that her little face in its eager happiness, and flushed delight, and speechless admiration of her young hero's perfections, was a pretty sight to see, and won for her a far larger share of notice than usual; the more so that she did not sit looking reproachfully miserable or cruelly slighted when Steenie whirled by with Grace Crawford's imperious black eyes looking over his shoulder, but like a wise girl, danced very merrily with somebody else, and heartily enjoyed her share of favour when her turn came.

Kate Leeson declared Steenie was utterly irresistible in his glittering uniform and black moustache and curls, and that deliciously touching empty coat sleeve, and the slight tone of languor in his clear boyish voice, a moving reminder of his late sufferings; and Mrs. Selwyn

made a distinguished guest of him, every now and then taking his arm for a progress round the room, pointing him out to strangers, and entrusting him with the choice of the dances, to the exclusion of her own son, who although he had been also at Waterloo, had come back, as Maude indignantly said, without even a scratch.

So "all went merry as a marriage bell." I gratefully remember how kind everybody was to me, how many friendly glances and words I received, how even people I knew little of would look at me with a sort of sympathising interest, which though at first it brought a rush of blood to my cheek and a pang to my heart, I knew was tenderly meant; and how good Steenie was, and how brotherly and attentive, insisting on my dancing often with him, under the kindly pretext that I was the best dancer in the room, and coming up to me so often to take me for a turn round it, and to ask with his affectionate smile if I was well amused.

All seemed to have entered into a friendly con-

spiracy to make me forget my sorrow, and it might have slept for a little while in the music and whirl of the bright room, had not some voices, accidentally overheard, stirred up the phantom to look at me with reproachful eyes.

The speakers were two or three officers, who stood in the deep recess of the window, half hidden by the heavy drapery of the curtains, outside of which I was sitting by Aunt Mary, looking at the waltzers.

"There goes Steenie Brotherton," said one of them, whose voice I did not recognize, as Steenie whirled past with Kate Leeson, "as merry as ever. He doesn't seem to take the loss of his arm much to heart."

"He's right there, fretting wouldn't bring it back again, and then the women worship him for it. It's so interesting, say they."

"Yes, it's rather absurd the fuss all the girls are making about him to-night. I asked Grace Crawford to dance just now, and she informed me with an air of profound scorn that she was engaged to Captain Brotherton; then I tried that

little Scotch lassie, Jessie Macdonald, with no better luck."

"Ah, little Jessie!" resumed the first speaker. "People say she's engaged to him, if so love has improved her wonderfully; she looks amazingly pretty to-night."

"Pshaw! I don't believe a word of it; that empty sleeve of his would hardly have made such havoc in her heart. Marrying and sympathizing are two different affairs."

"Widely different, but it's all jealousy, Merton," laughed another, who from his hearty tone I guessed to be Captain Robertson, Frank's old friend; "for my part I think Steenie Brotherton a fine fellow, and if women's smiles can console him for the loss of his right arm at four-and-twenty, why he's welcome to them, poor lad!"

"Who was that tall, pale girl he was dancing with just now?" said one, whose voice sounded strange to me.

"Why his cousin, Miss Marsden."

"What, Helen Marsden, whom I remember

here two years ago? Lord bless me, how changed she is; I should never have known her!"

"Ah, poor girl, hers is a sad story," said Captain Robertson's voice.—"She was engaged to my poor friend Langley, who fell at Waterloo; they were strongly attached, and she has never recovered the blow."

"Poor thing, she looks like a broken lily. Wasn't there something mysterious—he returned as missing, and his body never found?"

"Yes."

"By Jove! an uncomfortable sort of doom for the poor girl. Why she might marry, and he might start up some day and show her he was never killed at all. What a confounded disagreeable scrape!"

I felt sick at heart at hearing my life-sorrow thus lightly and carelessly spoken of, and shuddered with a nameless kind of self-upbraiding terror.

But the music stopped, and the dispersing crowd of dancers scattered themselves over the

spacious room, and Steenie came up to me, flushed and handsome, with Jessie on his arm.

"We have had the most delightful waltz in the world," said little simple Jessie enthusiastically, shaking back her disordered brown ringlets from her sparkling face, and looking at her partner with a pretty delighted gratitude.

"Without exception; and I have had the most charming partner in the universe," returned Steenie laughing back at her with his blithe good humour. "Now sit down, Jessie, by Helen's side; you must be tired, I am sure, after all this twirling," and he placed her in the vacant seat beside me.

"And now, Nell," lowering his voice a little, "tall, white, delicate lily-flower as you are, I am going to make a desperate attempt to bring some colour into your cheeks. You and I will have a waltz together while Jessie rests."

"No, indeed, Steenie, thank you."

"Yes, indeed, Helen; and now tell me," in a whisper, "what has vexed you? There are tears

in your dark eyes; what has brought them there, my dear, patient, quiet, true-hearted Nell, whom, if we were not in a ball-room, I should feel strongly disposed to kiss. Why, you are so pure and delicate and fragile a blossom, in your white drapery and faintly tinted roses, that I don't wonder at poor Charlie ——"

"What of Charlie?"

"Oh! nothing, only a sudden notion, ridiculous enough. Come," he said, laughing at my astonished looks, "take my arm, and we'll go and demand another waltz. I see Mrs. Selwyn marshalling a company of elderlies down to supper, so the room will be cleared," and away he hurried towards the musicians, and coming back triumphant, seized and flew away with me to the inspiriting strains.

Our waltz lasted so long, that I thought it never would end, and when at last, at the final crash of the band, we stopped, I flushed, giddy, and breathless, Steenie protested with delight that he had at last brought some colour into my cheeks, and completed his victory by dragging

me down to supper, in spite of all my arguments against the injustice of such a proceeding.

Mrs. Selwyn's champagne seemed to infuse an electric influence into everybody—dancers and musicians; but I felt so insupportably weary, that I sought refuge after supper by Aunt Mary's side, and positively refused to dance any more. Maude, Jessie, and Steenie, however, were in the full whirl of excited enjoyment, so it was two in the morning ere Aunt Mary made a decisive rise, and obdurately resisting all further supplications, told Steenie to see after the carriage; and thus, at last, and after the usual bustle of shawling and leave-taking, we found ourselves—to the intense relief of my weary limbs and aching head—rolling through the hushed streets and lines of closed shops and houses, out into the dark, quiet road, and under the pale moonlight, gleaming out from the rifts of dark, flying clouds.

Maude and Jessie were in a perfect flutter of restless spirits when we reached home, and entered the deserted drawing-room, lit by the

red glare of the sinking embers, full of the adventures and delights of the evening, and scorning the very idea of bed; but Aunt Mary seeing how thoroughly wearied I was, sent me to my room with a kiss, promising to send Peggy to undress me, and I went up stairs after a tender good-night from them all, very slowly, through the broken gleams of the white moonlight.

END OF VOL. II.







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